

ISLAM AND SOCIAL ETHICS

S.M.A. RAUF

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FOREWORD

“ ISLAM AND SOCIAL ETHICS” by S.M.A. Rauf is a valuable addition to the Islamic literature on “ethics”.

Islam seeks comprehensive reform in all aspects of human life, hence it addresses the individual, the society and the state; which constitute the three focal points of human existence. Obviously “the individual” is the most fundamental of them. A healthy society is built when individuals are able to cultivate a healthy personality within themselves.

Islam begins the process of personality building with faith in one God (Iman). With the proclamation of “Iman”, an individual starts his/her journey towards a better, healthier personality; whence all the hidden potentialities in an individual are fully realized. This process, called “tazkiyah” in the Quranic terminology, is the basic prerequisite for success (Falah).

Faith as Iman manifests itself in a number of characteristics; which have been beautifully described by the learned author. These characteristics are honesty, humility, kindness, modesty, self control, patience, perseverance, courage, integrity, contentment, benevolence, justice and gentleness. All these desirable traits grow naturally when a person sincerely believes in God, follows unconditionally all His commandments and is conscious of accountability before God. A society comprising such morally upright individuals is therefore a healthy society and its social fabric embodies the human values, which have always been intuitively recognized by human beings as universal values.

The process of healthy reform is complete, when the state (in addition to the individual and the society) also bases its conduct on the sound moral principles. We hope that in the Muslim world, people will strive towards creating better societies and better states; thus implementing the Islamic programme for reform of human life, in its totality. The present book will certainly help in creating the atmosphere conducive for such a comprehensive effort. May Allah reward the author for his valuable contribution, in this direction.

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(M. Rafat)

ON LAWFUL EARNING

Most of the social evils in the world are due to man's cupidity. In this lust for riches, he has obliterated the distinction between the lawful and unlawful means of earning. Since acquisition of wealth has become the sole pursuit of man's life he has thrown overboard all moral and ethical considerations. This accounts for the fraudulence and other deceitful practices in the world of commerce and trade.

Islam does not lay embargo on acquiring wealth but it does not allow its followers to thrive at the cost of others. It sanctions only lawful earnings and the door of ill-gotten wealth has been barred. And so far as lawful earning is concerned, it is obligatory for every grown up man and woman. The holy Prophet (Peace be upon him) said: "Endeavour to earn lawful livelihood is obligatory in addition to other obligatory duties" (*Baihaqi*). According to another Tradition, he is reported to have said to Anir bin el-Aas: "Clean and lawful wealth is a good thing (and a blessing for a virtuous bondsman)" (*Masnad-i-Ahmed*).

What is the criterion of lawful income? All those avenues of income are lawful in which the exchange of benefit between the persons concerned is just and equitable. On the other hand the income which is earned at the expense of others is unlawful. Islam has therefore prohibited theft, bribery, gambling and interest because the income through these means does not satisfy the criterion of a just and equitable exchange of benefit between the persons concerned. Even the lawful means of income is likely to become unlawful if a person does not fulfil the terms of agreement.

To eliminate the concentration of wealth in a few hands, Islam has enjoined upon the believers to fulfil their obligations to others. They should not spend all that they earn on themselves. They should rather share their wealth with the poor and the needy. The holy Prophet warned his followers that they would have to render full account of everything including wealth on the Final Day of Reckoning:

On the last Day (when the people will be brought together for the Final Requital), no one's feet will move until he has been questioned about five things: about his life, and how he lived; about his youth, and wherein he wasted it; about his wealth, and wherefrom he acquired it, and on what he spent it; and about what he did in what he was given the knowledge of (*Tirmidhi*),

The prayer of a man is not accepted unless his food and clothes are pure. Allah is pure and, therefore, He accepts offerings that are pure, that is, from goods acquired through legitimate means. The ill-gotten wealth is so hateful to Him that even if a man offers his supplication to Him, it will not be accepted. The holy Prophet (peace be upon him) narrated the story of a man who undertakes a long journey to a holy place and arrives there in such a condition that his hair is disshelved and his body is covered with dust. He raises his hands towards the heaven and cries: 'O Lord, O my Preserver!' But his food is of the impure, his dress is of the impure, and he has been brought upon what is impure: how his prayer can then be granted? (*Muslim*)

To the secularists the end justifies the means. In other words, a man can resort to any means, fair or foul, to achieve his objective. Islam does not approve of this. In Islam both the means and the ends must be good. The constructions of a mosque, for example, is a virtuous act. But it will cease to be a virtuous act if it is constructed out of the wealth acquired through illegitimate means. This is evident from the following Tradition of the holy Prophet (peace be upon him):

If a person earns or acquires anything (through dishonest means), and, then, gives away a part of it in charity, the act of charity will not be accepted, and if he will spend from it on his needs, there will be inauspiciousness in it, and if he will leave it behind to his descendents, it will serve for him as a provision of hell. Believe it, God does not remove evil with evil; but evil with good. One impurity does not annul another (*Musnad-i-Ahmed*).

The divine ordinance prohibiting the unlawful income is for the benefit of man. In a society where people are unscrupulous in earning their livelihood, there prevails selfishness which repudiates the bond of human relation. This state of affair is by no means conducive to the peace and progress of society. We should therefore regulate our economic life in accordance with the teachings of Allah and His Messenger.

ON HONESTY IN TRADE

Islam provides guidance to man in the totality of life. It enjoins upon the believers to regulate their socio-economic and political life in accordance with the teachings of Allah and His Messenger. The holy Quran commands: "O ye who believe! / Enter into Islam / whole-heartedly" (2:208). Man's misery lies in dividing his life into various compartments, following the divine commandment in some and discarding it in others. This betrays his lack of sincerity as a believer. For a true believer it is incumbent to submit unreservedly to the Will of Allah, regardless of profit and loss.

The world of commerce and trade is beset with many temptations. A trade is often confronted with situations in which, apparently there is danger of loss if he adheres to honesty and a good prospect of gain if he disregards it. He acquits himself successfully through this trial if he transacts his business as enjoined by Allah and His Messenger and thereby propitiates them. The divine munificence befalls on those who deal in business transactions honestly and conscientiously. They hold a respectable position in this world and they will also enjoy the divine blessing in the hereafter. The holy Prophet said (peace be upon him):

The trader who plies his trade cleanly and honestly will rise, in the Hereafter, in the company of the Prophets, the Truthful, and the Martyrs (*Tirmidhi*).

The key to prosperity in commercial transactions is honesty and fair-dealings. Dishonesty may yield temporary benefit but in the long run it proves to be ruinous. Square dealings, on the other hand, may suffer from temporary setback, but ultimately it is rewarding. The business community should, therefore, refrain from those practices which are prohibited by Allah and which would make it unworthy of His grace. The holy Quran instructs the businessmen to observe the same weight and measurement for the sale as well as purchase of commodities:

Give just measure, / And cause no loss/ (To others by fraud)./
And weigh with scales / True and upright./ And withhold not
things / Justly due to men,/ Nor do evil in the land,/ Working
mischief (26:181-3).

The holy Prophet (peace be upon him) has forbidden excessive swearing in business transactions, for it is likely to involve falsehoods which, once detected, will damage the reputation of the trader and consequently ruin his business: "Avoid much swearing while transacting business because it produces a ready sale but blots out the blessings." (*Muslim*)

Islam has also prohibited the sale and purchase of commodities such as alcohol, swine, dead bodies of animals and idols because they are unlawful for Muslims. It is equally sinful to sell the commodities without making their defects, if any, known to the buyer. If the trader knows the defect of the goods, he should reveal it to the customer before striking the bargain. Once the holy Prophet (peace be upon him) happened to pass by a corn-dealer. He thrust his hand into the heap of corn and felt his finger damp. On being asked, the corn-dealer replied that it was due to rain. The Apostle of Allah (peace be upon him) then observed: "why didn't you let the wet corn on the top so that the buyers could see it? (Listen), he who deceives is not of us." (*Muslim*)

Monopoly, hoarding and smuggling are all prohibited by Islam because they lead to the exploitation of consumers. Monopoly means complete control on the supply of goods in a few hands with a view to creating artificial crisis and rise in price. The traders resort to hoarding and stop the supply of commodities in the market until such time as the prices rise. This is called *Ihtikar* in Arabic. The holy Prophet (peace be upon him) has strongly condemned both these practices: "The trader who resorts to *Ihtikar*, that is, stores up food grains and other necessities of life, waiting for a time of dearness, is a sinner." (*Muslim*).

Smuggling is also detrimental to the economy of the country and, therefore, it is unlawful. Although the holy Quran and the Traditions of the holy Prophet (peace be upon him) are silent about this, it is against the spirit of Islam. Any practice in business which is likely to aggravate human sufferings is deprecated by Islam.

To conclude, Islam is opposed to exploitation and economic injustice in any form. It does not want to leave the consumers at the mercy of unscrupulous businessmen and, therefore, it has prescribed the rules of business. Those who conduct their business according to these rules have been promised of great reward in this world as well as in the world to come. As for those who transgress these rules, they should be prepared to face the consequence on the Day of Requital.

ON EXCELLENCE OF GIVING LOAN

Next to belief and prayer, Islam underlines the need to foster the bond of human relation. The believers have been enjoined to share the sorrows and happiness of others. They have been exhorted to be kind and sympathetic to the fellow-beings in distress and crisis. The affluent section in the community has greater responsibility in this respect. It should share its wealth with the poor and the downtrodden. It is this spirit of co-operation and well-being that can establish a social order free from class conflict and exploitation.

Advancing loan to a needy person is a gesture of good-will and help which contributes immensely to the fostering of human relation. The reward of this, according to the holy Prophet (peace be upon him), is even greater than that for charity:

As a person entered Heaven, he saw that it was written on the gate of Heaven that the recompense of charity was ten-fold and on giving a loan, eighteen-fold (*Tabrani*).

A man who solicits alms and charity has something whereas a person who seeks loan has nothing. The act of giving loan is, therefore, more rewarding than that of giving charity. A self-respecting man who is in dire need of money prefers loan to charity. To give loan to such a person is certainly better than charity.

The fact that the holy Prophet (peace be upon him) himself used to borrow, indicates that there is nothing despicable in it. The creditor should not hold the borrower in contempt. He should rather cheerfully come to his help. A man should borrow only when it becomes unavoidable. So far as the holy Prophet (Peace be upon him) is concerned, he borrowed for religious purposes such as *Jihad*, not to meet the basic necessities of his life.

Islam has exhorted the well-to-do persons in the community to lend money to the needy and allow them sufficient respite in returning it and, if possible, to write off altogether or in part if the borrower is unable to repay it. On the other hand, the borrower has

been urged to pay back his loan as soon as possible because if he died in a state of indebtedness he will be answerable in the hereafter. Allah cannot expiate the sin of indebtedness until the debt is paid by someone on behalf of the borrower or the creditor himself foregoes it. The holy Prophet (peace be upon him) refused to lead the funeral prayer of those who died without settling their dues or leaving behind enough assets to pay them off. He warned:

After the major sins (such as polytheism and adultery) from which God has strictly enjoined upon us to abstain, the greatest sin is that a man died in a state that he owed a debt to anyone and left behind no assets to pay it off. (*Masnad-i-Ahmed and Daarmi*).

On another occasion he said: "If a person is killed in the path of God, all his sins are forgiven, (by virtue of martyrdom), except a loan." (*Muslim*).

Martyrdom is a noble act. It leads to the forgiveness of all sins except the sin of indebtedness. Since loan is related to human rights, Allah cannot forgive the debtor until the creditor himself foregoes his claim or someone else pays back on his behalf.

If a man borrows loan without the intention of repaying it and dies, there is severe punishment for him in the Next World. On the other hand if a person sincerely wishes to pay back the loan but cannot do so owing to adverse circumstances and departs from the world, Allah will have his loan paid back somehow. This is evident from the following Tradition of the holy Prophet (peace be upon him):

Whoever borrows (money etc.) from anyone and has the intention to return it, God will make it possible for him to pay it back, i.e., help him to clear it up, and if he cannot do so in his life-time, God will settle it, on his behalf, in the Hereafter, and, thus, release him of the responsibility. And whoever borrows (money etc.) from anyone and has no intention to pay it back, God will have it destroyed, i.e., the money will not only prove a curse in After-life, but, in this world too, it will be of no help or comfort to him (*Bukhari*).

Islam has thus defined the rights and obligations of the lenders as well as the borrowers. While it is obligatory for the rich to lend money to the needy brethren, the latter have been enjoined to clear their loan as early as possible. If they fail to do so, they have been

warned of the dire consequence on the Final Day of Reckoning. The affluent section in the community should not only be liberal in lending money to the needy but also be considerate in giving respite to repay the loan. On the other hand, the borrower should make every effort to repay his loan at the earliest convenience.

ON FALSEHOOD AND BREACH OF TRUST

To a true believer, the aim of his life is to propitiate Allah. With this end in view, he submits himself unquestionably to the divine commandments. Since the teachings of Allah and His Apostle (peace be upon him) are for the good of man, he should abide by them in his own interest. On this depends the progress and prosperity of the individual and society. Moral depravity has invariably brought about the fall of nations. Islam has, therefore, underlined the need to develop sound moral attributes in the life of individual as well as community. In all our dealings, whether it be between the two individuals or nations, we should be guided by the principle of honesty and truthfulness.

Faith and falsehood cannot co-exist. A true Muslim may have other weaknesses but he is not expected to resort to falsehood. If he tells lies, it will mean that the reality of Islam has not yet dawned upon him and, therefore, he must overcome this vice, unless, of course, he wants to remain in that state of imperfection in faith. Lying is a very grave sin. It is the most serious of perfidy because it betrays the confidence of a person and thereby plays false upon him. The holy Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "A most serious form of betrayal of faith is that you tell a lie to a brother while he believes that you are truthful in what you say" (*Abu Dawood*).

The holy Quran also enjoins upon the faithful to foster the virtue of truthfulness because it prevents them from falling into other vices:

O ye who believe! Stand out firmly/ For justice, as witnesses/ To God, even as against/ Yourselves, or your parents/ Or your kin,
and whether/ It be (against) rich or poor (4:135)

Justice is a divine attribute. As a true believer, we should promote this attribute in ourselves, even if it is detrimental to our own interest or to the interest of those who are near and dear to us. In other words, we should refrain from lying under all circumstances.

Lie is the mother of all vices and, therefore, if person forbears from falsehood, he will overcome all other vices. Once a man, who was addicted to wine, theft and debauchery, called on the holy Prophet (peace be upon him) seeking his advice to reform himself. He advised him to refrain from lying and directed him to see him again. He gladly consented to abide by this advice because he thought that it would not interfere with his favourite habits. One day when he was served with wine, he abstained from drinking because he would have to confess before the holy Prophet (peace be upon him). Thereafter he gave up all other evil practices. The promise to speak the truth thus saved him from many other vices.

At times we indulge in falsehood simply in order to amuse others. This is also forbidden by the holy Prophet (peace be upon him): "Fie upon him who tells lie for the amusement of people" (*Masnad-i-Ahmed, Tirmidhi*). Rumour-mongering also falls within the purview of falsehood. It does not, therefore, behove the Muslims to spread anything without verifying its authenticity. The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) warned his followers to desist from this practice: "It is enough (to make a man guilty of falsehood) that he goes about circulating what he hears (from others)" (*Muslim*).

Although telling a lie is a mortal sin, it is permissible under the following situations:

- a) To bring about reconciliation among the hostile Muslims.
- b) To square up the differences between the husband and wife.
- c) To save the life and honour of an innocent person from the oppression of the tyrants if there is no other way to protect him.
- d) In war

This relaxation is evidenced from the following Tradition of the holy Prophet (peace be upon him):

Falsehood is unlawful except in three (matters): Falsehood of a man to his wife to please her, falsehood in war, falsehood in restoring peace among men. (*Tirmidhi*).

Like Truthfulness, Islam has made it obligatory for the Muslims to fulfil their commitments. Breach of trust or

commitment is identical to untruthfulness. Before entering into any agreement, one must, therefore, consider whether or not one will be able to fulfil it. If he has promised to do something, he must fulfil it as a matter of duty. However, if a person fails to honour his commitment, despite his best intention, because of the intractable circumstances, he will not be guilty of a breach of promise. To quote the holy Prophet (peace be upon him): "If a person promises his brother to visit him, and it is also, his intention to do so, but (owing to some reason) he cannot go at the appointed time then there is no sin" (*Tirmidhi*).

ON JUSTICE AND EQUITY

The modern civilization, in spite of unprecedented progress in science and technology, is on the brink of disintegration. There prevails ubiquitous confusion and uncertainty. Man has become the enemy of man. He has no scruples in resorting to the most heinous crime against humanity. He is a slave to his passions and desires. He is desperate to fulfil them even at the cost of others. Peace is elusive in spite of the effort of the world community. The principle of "live and let other live" no longer holds good. And yet we claim to be enlightened and civilized.

The peace and prosperity of a nation or, for that matter, the world at larger depend upon the spirit of co-operation and well-being. As the human body cannot function smoothly if its different parts are in conflict with each other, so the happiness and prosperity in the life of the individual as well as society are not possible unless we cultivate the spirit of self-sacrifice and co-operation. The order and coherence in the universe would not have been possible if its various parts had worked in isolation. All created beings in this universe are governed by this law of unity. The directing force behind this unity is the Eternal, the Everlasting, Who has no beginning and no end, that is, Allah.

The edifice of Islamic justice is structured on this principle of co-operation and harmony. Human relation, whether it be between the individual and society, parents and children, husband and wife, or the member states, is based on mutual love and respect. As long as they fulfil their obligations to each other, there prevails complete peace and amity. But the moment they encroach upon the rights of others, there ensues conflict and strife.

Justice is a divine attribute. Since Allah has created mankind, He does not discriminate between the believers and the unbelievers in providing them with the basic necessities of life. Similarly His promise to reward the hard-working individuals or nations, irrespective of their belief, is consistent with the canon of justice. Even the punishment for the defiance of divine authority is in accordance with the principle of justice. Since man is created by

Allah, it is only obligatory for him to obey His commands. If he fails to do so, justice demands that he should be punished. Allah is not only just but also merciful. He, therefore, gives enough respite to the wrong-doers to reform themselves. In spite of this, if they persist in wrong doing, the divine retribution operates.

Needless to say then that we, as His created beings, should promote this divine attribute in ourselves. Otherwise the future of mankind is bleak. In a society where there is no justice, the judiciary becomes the institutions of cruelty. The government functionaries abuse their offices multiplying the sufferings of people. This in turn gives rise to open rebellion. To forestall this situation, it is essential to dispense even-handed justice without any discrimination. The holy Quran says: "And when you judge between man and man, you should judge with justice" (4:58).

The Quranic concept of justice is based on balance, equity, duty and trust. Islam lays stress on the even dispensation of justice, that is, good should be rewarded and the evil punished. The Quran holds out the assurance that "every soul shall be paid in full for what it has wrought" (39:71) on the Final Day of Reckoning. In the administration of justice, the believers have been enjoined to maintain equity between Muslims and non-Muslims, friends and foes. In *Surah Al-Nisa*, verse 135, the holy Quran commands:

O ye who believe! Stand out firmly / For justice, as witness/ To
God, even as against / Yourself, Or your kin, and whether/ It be
(against) rich or poor....

Justice is imposed on man as a duty. He who shirks this responsibility shall be punished in the life hereafter. It is a kind of trust which every individual must discharge conscientiously. This is evident from the following verse of the holy Quran:

God doth command you/ To render back your Trust/ To those to
whom they are due;/ And when ye judge/ Between man and man,
/ That ye judge with justice (4:58)

Those who hold the highest position carry greater burden of trust. The people should, therefore, exercise greater care in the selection of persons who will assume the responsibilities as a matter of trust. Should they choose untrustworthy persons, this will only add to their sufferings.

To conclude, justice should not be misconstrued as being equal distribution of rights. Of course, in certain respects it does ensure equality among people, for example, in the distribution of rights as citizens. But there are other spheres in which equal dispensation of rights will be against the law of nature such as between parents and children, or in the payment of wages for work of a higher or lower level. What Islam wants is a fair and reasonable balance and right proportion, not even distribution of rights. In addition, it calls for providing equal opportunities to all the members of society to improve their economic lot.

ON INTEREST

Islam intends to establish a social order which is free from exploitation and economic injustice. It has therefore enjoined upon the believers to refrain from all those practices which are likely to promote them. In the pre-Islamic era, the Arabs, like other communities of the world, indulged in usury. They lent money to the needy at a fixed rate of interest and if they failed to repay it within the stipulated period, the interest was increased proportionately. The borrowers thus suffered terribly and the money-lenders thrived at their cost. Opposed as this practice was to the spirit of Islam, the Quran and the holy Prophet (peace be upon him) forbade it in the strongest terms: Islam teaches sharing of wealth with the poor and the needy. The edifice of Islamic social justice is structured along the principle of kindness, compassion, generosity and self-denial. The well-to-do persons in the community should look after the less fortunate brethren. And they should do so not for the sake of worldly gain but to propitiate Allah alone.

The strategy of Islamic teachings has always been one of gradualism. The Quranic injunctions prohibiting alcohol, usury and other vices were, therefore, enforced gradually. Initially the Quran laid stress on providing help and succour to the distressed and the downtrodden and cultivating the virtues of compassion, generosity and self-sacrifice. It was then impressed upon the people that death was inescapable and their riches would be of no avail to them on the Day of Resurrection unless it was spent to earn the pleasure of Allah. These teachings thus paved the way for the abolition of usurious practice. The concluding verse of *Surah Al-Baqrah* was then revealed forbidding unambiguously the lending and borrowing of money at interest:

Those who devour usury/ Will not stand except/ As stands one
whom/ The Evil one by his touch/ Hath driven to madness./ That
is because they say:/ "Trade is like usury"/ But God hath
permitted trade/ And forbidden usury (2:275).

Usury is one of the major sins and more forbidding than adultery, gambling and murder. Persistence in usury, despite this clear

warning, is open rebellion against Allah and His Messenger: "If ye do it not/ Take notice of war/ From God and His Apostle" (2:279).

The holy Prophet (peace be upon him) also condemned usury as a mortal sin and spelt the curse of Allah not only on those who take or offer loan on usurious terms but also on those who write the deed of it or bear witness to such transactions (*Muslim*). On the night of the Prophet's ascension to Heaven, he saw a group of persons whose bellies were like houses full of snakes which could be seen from outside also. On being asked, Gabriel replied that they were usurers (*Ibn-e-Majah*).

Wealth acquired through usury is a curse. "However plentiful the interest may be, its end is want and scarcity", said the holy Prophet (peace be upon him) (*Ibn-e-Majah*). One may add to his wealth by usurious means, but in the long run it proves disastrous. Moreover, it is common experience that people who live on usury seldom enjoy peace and happiness, in spite of the enormous wealth they possess.

Usury is baneful in many respects. In the first place, it promotes selfishness, miserliness and hard-heartedness. The more a man is involved in usury, the more he becomes morally decadent. Charity, on the other hand, develops broadmindedness, sympathy and generosity. Secondly, usury establishes a relationship among people in which all transactions are based on personal interest. The needs of one man become a source of exploitation for another. The affluent sections in the community maximize their profit at the expense of the poor. This kind of relationship is far from conducive to social stability or mutual understanding. Consequently, there develops a sense of jealousy and distrust towards others. Thirdly, usury retards the economic prosperity of the country. Loans are usually advanced to the individuals in need for private consumption or to the men for their business enterprise. The hardships of the loan which befall the individuals have already been described earlier. As for the loan of the second category, it also creates many problems. Since the professional men have to pay interest according to a fixed rate, they invest their capital in such projects which can yield greater profit, even though they may be of no public utility and importance. This kind of unproductive investment hinders the progress of the country.

ON PRIDE AND SELF-CONCEIT

Pride is man's mortal enemy. It hinders his progress spiritually as well as materially. It makes him complacent about his achievement and, therefore, he does not feel obliged to strive further. Such an attitude is by no means conducive to the progress of an individual or a nation. Perfection is an attribute which is exclusive to Allah alone. Man, however great his achievements may be, cannot lay claim to it. In view of the vast explosion of knowledge he cannot claim "all knowledge to be his province", even if he devotes all his life to its acquisition. It does not therefore behove a man to be vainglorious. He should rather be humble and modest. The more humble he is, the more the chances of his improvement are. Humility goads him to strive further whereas vanity stifles his curiosity and initiative.

Humility is the symptom of Faith whereas pride is the negation of Faith. Pride and Faith cannot co-exist. Faith demands complete submission to the will of Allah. It is essentially an act of acceptance which inspires a course of conduct. Pride, on the other hand, is the result of total reliance on reason. Those who rely entirely on their reason and intellect are unable to resolve the mystery of the transcendental world and, therefore, they become defiant to Allah. It was this attitude which prompted *Iblis* to disobey His command:

And behold, We said to the angels: Bow-down to Adam: "and they bowed down: "Not so *Iblis*: he refused and was haughty: He was of those who reject Faith (2:234).

Pride also engenders self-glorification. When the satisfaction of self becomes the chief end of man's life, he flouts the divine commandment with impunity. The concept of accountability assumes no significance in the fabric of his life.

This penchant for self-glorification not only emboldens him to belie the Truth but also persuades him to hold in contempt the fellow-beings. The holy Quran says:

And swell not thy cheek/ (For pride) at men,/ Nor walk in insolence/ Through the earth;/ For God loveth not/ Any arrogant boaster (31:18)

Pride is the sole prerogative of Allah because He is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. Man's position in the universe is that of a bondsman. He is a created being. Whatever he possesses, even his body, should be looked upon as a gesture of divine kindness. Man owns nothing and is utterly dependent upon Allah. It is then only desirable that he be grateful to his Lord. And the best way to express gratitude is to be loyal and obedient to Him. The test of loyalty consists in surrendering wholeheartedly to His commands. The Prophet Abraham (peace be upon him) acquitted himself successfully through this trial which earned him and his progeny the blessings of Allah. The key to success in this life as well as in the life to come lies in unswerving allegiance to the Creator. Thus we can subdue the self and pay our gratitude to Him.

In the words of the Quran, man is the vicegerent of Allah. As a vicegerent, it is obligatory for him to execute His instructions unquestioningly. If he questions the validity of divine ordinance or modifies it, he will be guilty of abusing the office of vicegerency. This will be tantamount to challenging the sovereignty of Allah and relying too heavily on his own wisdom. To put it differently, it is his pride which prompts him to this disobedience. This, in turn, leads to chaos and disorder in society which only aggravates human misery. Conversely, if he fulfils his obligation as a vicegerent, there will prevail peace and happiness in society.

Pride manifests itself in yet another form. Sometimes it finds expression in ostentatious dress or other worldly possessions. That is why the holy Prophet (peace be upon him) admonished the believers against pomp and grandeur in life. They should rather lead simple and austere life. The primary aim of the faithful should be to work for those ideals which ensure his salvation and reward in the Next world. Material prosperity often makes a man oblivious of his spiritual responsibilities. It fosters an attitude of prodigality and overweening vanity. And the proud, said the holy Prophet (peace be upon him), shall never enter Paradise: "Nobody who has faith to the weight of a mustard seed, shall enter the Fire and nobody who has got pride equivalent to the weight of mustard seed shall enter Paradise" (*Muslim*).

ON BRIBERY

Islam lays great stress on lawful earning. Wealth acquired through unlawful means is an anathema for Muslims, because it promotes selfishness and exploitation. The criterion of lawful income is just and equitable exchange of benefit between two individuals. Any sources of income in which one individual thrives at the cost of others are prohibited by Islam. Islam is not opposed to acquiring wealth but it should be acquired as ordained by Allah and His Messenger. Honesty and square-dealing should be guiding principle in every sphere of life.

There are many avenues of unlawful income. Bribery is one of them. Like all monetary transactions, it involves two individuals: the donor and the recipient. The former bribes the latter to gain his favour to get an unlawful work done. The latter accepts the illegal gratification because of his insatiable lust for money. Both of them are, therefore, equally guilty in this illegal traffic and deserve punishment. Bribery is one of the social vices which has now become a world-wide phenomenon. Even the most advanced nations of the world have not been able to overcome this. In a society where bribery becomes rampant, the people suffer terribly because they are deprived of their due rights. In other words, they become the victim of gross injustice and exploitation. Islam has, therefore, prohibited this corrupt practice. The holy Quran says:

And do not eat up / Your property among yourselves / For
vanities, nor use it/ As bait for the judges / With intent that ye
may/ Eat up wrongfully and knowingly / A little of (other)
people's property (2:188).

In the above verse the believers have been enjoined to forbear from 'eating up' the property of others as well as from offering it as 'bait' to the judges. Both the practices are equally detestable and forbidden by Islam, because they aggravate human suffering. The holy Prophet (peace be upon him) also cursed the one who gives illegal gratification and accepts it as well as who acts as a middleman between the two (*Ahmed*).

In spite of this clear warning, this evil practice continues unabated not only among the disbelievers but also among those who profess belief in Allah and His Messenger. From the moral point of view, even the disbelievers are not justified in indulging in this social evil. As an immoral act, bribery is universally condemned. There is hardly any individual, regardless of whether he believes or not in the divine injunctions, who can say 'yea' to it. As for the believers, they are obliged morally as well as by virtue of their faith to desist from this social vice.

It now remains to be examined why do people, specially the believers, indulge in bribery. This is symptomatic of their moral decadence and weakening of Faith. When the Faith of man weakens, he obliterate the distinction between the permissible and the prohibited. The strength of Faith, on the other hand, makes him scrupulous. It calls for strict adherence to the Will of Allah. A man who professes that 'there is no deity except Allah and Muhammad is His Messenger', is left with no option but to obey their commands. A true believer cannot therefore even conceive of taking bribe. Defiance of divine Authority inevitably leads to disbelief in the Day of Resurrection on which every individual will have to render account of his deeds. This emboldens him to commit sin after sin with impunity.

It is generally argued that bribery has become widespread because of the inequitable distribution of wealth in society. In other words, man is impelled to this illegal trade on account of his financial stringency. If it were so, the affluent section in the community would have been immune from this vice. But the fact is otherwise. On the other hand there are persons who, despite their poverty, maintain integrity and refrain from this illicit trade. It is not then poverty which prompts a man towards this sinful act, but the passion for material prosperity and affluence. And this passion becomes stronger and stronger when he ceases to be godfearing.

To overcome the many vices including bribery, the men at the helm, especially in the Muslim world, should restructure the social order on Islamic foundation. No law, however foolproof it may be, can arrest the social vices unless the individuals develop Allah-consciousness and the fear of accountability on the Final Day of Reckoning.

ON KINDNESS AND OPPRESSION

Islam is essentially a religion of peace and love. It teaches love and compassion for all irrespective of their religious belief. The spirit of love is not confined to the world of human beings but extends to the kingdom of animals as well. Man owes obligations to man as well as animals. In the pre-Islamic era, the Arabs had no respect for human values. They were characterized by vengeance, tribal rivalry and feud. The practice of female infanticide dominated their social life. The wives were subjected to inhuman atrocities. With the emergence of Islam, these cruel practices were eliminated. It strengthened the bond of love and affection among the warring Arabs. It demolished the man-made distinctions of race, colour and language. The idols of caste, creed and colour were destroyed along with the idols of stone and clay. Humanity thus regained its lost dignity and the brotherhood of mankind was established.

Kindness is a divine attribute. The divine benevolence is manifest all around. We owe our existence to His infinite benignity and favour. Whatever we have in this universe is all due to His grace and kindness. But for this favour, human life would not have been possible in this world. Allah is not only the Creator but also the Sustainer. To sustain life, He equipped this universe with all the necessary paraphernalia. To provide guidance to man, He sent His Prophets and revealed His Scriptures. In spite of these blessings man is ungrateful to his Lord. He flouts His commands brazenfacedly. Nevertheless, Allah, merciful as He is, continues to provide food and other necessities of life to him.

As a true believer, it is incumbent upon us to cultivate this divine attribute. Man devoid of tenderness and softer feelings is a veritable brute. Allah does not like those who are deprived of the noble sentiment of kindness and perpetuate tyranny on others. To invoke His mercy, it is imperative for us to show kindness to His creatures. The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said: "God is merciful to kind people. Be kind to those on the earth, the One in the Heavens will be kind to you" (*Tirmidhi*). On another occasion he said: "Kindness is not to be found in anything but that

it adds to its beauty and it is not withdrawn from anything but it makes it defective" (*Muslim*). Nothing can be a better exposition of the philosophy of kindness than this. Kindness adds to the beauty of human personality. It is the crowning glory of one's character. It ennoble him. Bereft of this noble sentiment, man becomes a devil incarnate and a source of perpetual distress and agony for the members of his community.

Islam does not, however, advocate mercy for the wrong-doers and criminals. If we are lenient to them, this will be an abuse of justice. The believers have been enjoined to be merciful as well as just. Justice demands that culprits must be punished. Otherwise, we shall not be able to arrest the tide of social vices. Justice also demands that punishment should be awarded in proportion to the offence and the benefit of doubt must invariably go in favour of the accused. The critics of Islam often raise hue and cry about the severity of some punishments such as the amputation of hands for theft, stoning to death for fornication, flogging for adultery, etc. Islam does not recommend these punishments unless there is sufficient evidence against the offenders. Moreover, these punishments are decreed only in an Islamic polity which must eliminate the factors contributing to these offences. To explain the matter further, the amputation of hands, for example, is permissible only when the government has established an economic system in which there is no scope for theft. In spite of this, if a man commits theft he deserves the amputation of hands. There is another fact which should be kept in view. These punishments, severe though appear to be, serve as an eye-opener to others.

The Islamic precept of kindness does not hold good against the aggressors and enemies of Islam. The holy Quran commands the believers to fight tooth and nail against them: "Fight in the cause of God/ Those who fight you, / But do not transgress limits; / For God loveth not transgressors" (2:190).

Even in such wars, the believers have been enjoined not to transgress the limits. They are forbidden to persecute women, children, the old and infirm. As for the prisoners of war, they should be treated with kindness and respect. And if the enemy comes to terms, peace should not be withheld.

ON ANGER

Islam teaches self-restraint and forbearance. The strong man, according to the holy Prophet (peace be upon him), is he who restrains his anger even in the face of great provocation (*Bukhari and Muslim*). Like many other passions, anger is a natural instinct. Even the Prophets were not exempt from this. Islam does not, however, allow the believers to lose temper and behave in a manner that is repugnant to the spirit of servitude to the Lord. Their piety lies in controlling the anger and forgiving the person who angered them, in spite of having power to punish him. This attitude fosters the bond of human relation and eliminates bitterness and hostility. On the other hand if we retaliate against the wrong-doer, this will only lead to an interminable hostility, disturbing peace and tranquility. That is why the holy Quran enjoins upon the faithful to "control their wrath and to be forgiving towards mankind" (3:134). The holy Prophet (peace be upon him) promised great reward for them:

Whoever drinks his anger when he is in a position to quench, that is, suppresses anger, solely for the sake of God, although he can give vent to his feelings, and refrains from visiting wrath upon the person who incurs it, the Lord will call him to Himself, in the presence of everyone, on the Day of Resurrection, and tell him to choose whichever bride he liked from among the brides of Heaven (*Tirmidhi*).

Islam forbids anger which is motivated by personal grievances. But it is lawful, if stirred, for example, by the humiliation meted out to the Prophet or his Companions. A true believer cannot remain indifferent when there is a systematic campaign to undo Islamic values. Neutrality on these occasions betrays his lack of Faith. It shows his fear of man rather than his Lord. Anger is not only justified but also permissible when there is a conflict between Truth and Falsehood. The believers have been enjoined to fight tooth and nail for the glory of Islam. They should not hesitate in laying down their life for the sake of Allah. But even on these occasions their resentment should not transcend the limits prescribed by Him. The holy Quran forbids them to behave in a manner that is unworthy of a true believer: "Fight in the cause of

God/ Those who fight you, but do not transgress limits; / For God loveth not transgressors" (2:190).

To control one's ire, the holy Prophet has suggested a few remedies: "When anyone of you is roused to anger, he should sit down if he is standing. If the anger subsides (as a result of this), well and good, and if it does not, he should lie down" (*Tirmidhi*).

On another occasion he advised:

Anger is roused under the influence of Satan, (one goes beyond the limits laid down by God under the influence of the Devil), and Satan has been created from fire and fire is put out with water. So when anyone of you is seized with anger, let him perform ablution (*Abu Dawood*).

The efficacy of these remedies can hardly be questioned. In a state of anger the blood pressure of man shoots up and he loses control over himself. By sitting down firmly at a place or, still more, by lying down, the blood pressure comes down to its normal level and the anger gradually subsides. It has yet another advantage. The possibility of doing many nasty and harmful things in anger is reduced to the minimum. As for the second remedy, it is equally efficacious in cooling down the flames of indignation. Anger is like fire which burns everything that comes on its way. Fire can only be extinguished with water. Hence the advice to perform ablution when one's ire is stirred. In addition to these, the holy Prophet also advised to keep quiet when a man is overtaken by anger. By maintaining silence he can avert his attention from the dispute which sparked off his anger.

To conclude, anger is an evil passion if it is purported by vengeance. It should, therefore, be restrained. But it is permissible when there is an attempt to damage the sanctity of religion or malign Allah and His Messenger. Resentment in these circumstances becomes obligatory for Muslims. If they let this vilification campaign go unprotected, this will only provide encouragement to the enemies of Islam. But the language of protest should not be indecorous. The holy Prophet (peace be upon him) warned his followers against the use of intemperate language and returning abuse with abuse: "A faithful believer neither attacks with his tongue nor utters a curse nor speaks ill of anyone nor calls names" (*Tirmidhi*). To revile and resort to coarse and indecent language are beneath the dignity of a true believer.

ON DOUBLE-DEALING

Islam strongly condemns hypocrisy. It assumes many forms. Double-dealing is one of them. It has infected every facet of our social life. On the political scene, it has left its indelible mark. Treachery, breaking of promises, lack of fidelity, crushing the right of others: these are considered the feats of successful diplomacy. Man's life has therefore become miserable. The people today talk glibly of human rights and values. But in their practical life they have the least regard for them, especially when their own interests are threatened. This state of affair is mainly because they have set aside the moral and religious values. Enslaved as they are to the gods of appetite and passion, they have no scruples in resorting to the most heinous practices to satisfy them. In other words, double-dealing betrays lack of Faith. One who resorts to this villainy has no fear of accountability in the world Hereafter. The sacred Prophet (peace be upon him) warned the believers against this evil practice:

On the Day of Resurrection, the biggest loser will be the double-faced person who talk in one voice when he goes to one party, and in another voice when he goes to the other party. (*Bukhari and Muslim*).

On another occasion he said: "Whoever is double-faced in the world, that is, talks to different people in different voices, there will be two tongues of fire in his mouth on the Day of Final Judgment" (*Abu Dawood*).

The reward and punishment, which have been prescribed for man, are in proportion to the good or evil of his deed. The more virtuous a man is, the greater will be his reward. On the other hand, the more vicious a man is, the severer will be his punishment. The good or evil deeds on which depend the reward or penalty are of different kinds and grades. Double-dealing is a serious offence and, therefore, the holy Prophet (peace be upon him) warned that there would be two tongues of fire in the mouth of those who speak in different voices.

Duality is repugnant to the spirit of Islam. The believers have, therefore, been enjoined to desist from this. In the first place, it betrays the trust of the person and embitters the human relation. Secondly, the man who resorts to this evil practice loses the confidence of people. Double-dealing is like a two-edged weapon which strikes the individual as well as society. Islam, therefore, teaches plain-dealing and uniformity of behaviour in all spheres of life. Truthfulness and trustworthiness are the pre-requisites of Faith. But for these attributes, none can claim to be a true Muslim. Whether in politics or other affairs of life, the Muslim should be guided by these principles. To assume the posture of friendliness and sincerity in the presence of a person but acting treacherously behind his back is the sign of a dissembler. Similarly, to profess Islam as a true religion without regulating our conduct according to its teaching betrays hypocrisy. Most of the ills plaguing the world today are due to this incompatibility between profession and action. To rid the world of this miserable plight, we must shake off this dichotomy. This is possible only when we are single-minded in our devotion to Allah and regulate our life in accordance with His ordinance. No less important is the need to develop an awareness that we shall have to render account of all our actions in the world to come.

There are certain weaknesses, which we do not consider sinful and guard against them. It is about such acts and iniquities that the Quran has said: "ye thought? It to be a light matter, / While it was most serious/ In the sight of God" (24:15). Double-dealing is one of those acts which is regarded as the key to success in life. To political adventurers and others whose main preoccupation in life is how to achieve material prosperity, there is nothing unusual in this practice. But according to the Tradition of the holy Prophet (peace be upon him), cited earlier, there is grievous penalty for those who wear the mask of hypocrisy. The believers should heed this warning and henceforth keep straight in all his dealings. The life of the holy Prophet (peace be upon him) serves as a model for us. On no occasion he broke his pledge or behaved in a manner unworthy of divine Apostleship. We should therefore follow in his footsteps in conducting the affairs of life.

ON SLANDER AND BACKBITING

The essence of Islamic teaching is summed up in the following divine commandment:

Let there arise out of you / A band of people / Inviting to all that is good, / Enjoining what is right, / and forbidding what is wrong: / They are the ones/ to attain felicity (3:140).

The key to success in this world as well as in the Next lies in 'enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong'. This is an individual as well as collective responsibility. To fulfil this obligation, the individual must, in the first place, be himself imbued with Allah-Consciousness; and, secondly, he must strive in the path of Allah. Love of Allah also entails that the believers strengthen the bond of love and affection among the brethren-in-faith. They should refrain from doing anything, overtly or covertly, which might harm them.

Slander and backbiting militate against the spirit of love and respect among the follow-beings. Islam, therefore, condemns them in unequivocal terms. The holy Quran says:

O ye who believe! / Avoid suspicion as much / (As possible): For suspicion / In some cases is a sin: / And spy not on each other, / Nor speak ill of each other / Behind their backs. Would any / Of you like to eat / The flesh of his dead / Brother? Nay, ye would / Abhor it. But fear God: / For God is Oft- Returning, / Most Merciful (49:12).

Backbiting is a major sin. It is even worse than adultery. For the holy Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "If a person, unfortunately, commits adultery, he can be forgiven by God if he offers repentance, but backbiter will not be forgiven until he is forgiven by the person he had spoken ill of behind his back" (*Baihaqi*).

From the above verses and Traditions, it is obvious that backbiting and scandal-mongering are moral vices of serious nature. Backbiting is likened to 'eating the flesh of one's dead brother' and slander, since it is unfounded, is even worse than backbiting. Backbiting does not merely consist in talking ill of

others behind their backs. It includes all those acts, which are intended to tarnish the image of a person when he is not present. Even the gesture of mockery falls within the purview of backbiting. And it is not only the speaker but also the listener who shares the sin of backbiting. It has become a favourite pastime in the world. We continue to dabble in it without ever realizing that it is a sinful act. To speak ill of others, when they cannot defend themselves, is by itself against the canon of morality. The impact of this vice on the communal life is far-reaching. It often brings about rupture in the friendly relations and gives rise to hostility. Islam teaches co-operation and love among Muslims. Backbiting and vilification are contrary to the spirit of Islam. The holy Prophet (peace be upon him), therefore, warned that a backbiter would not enter Paradise (*Muslim*).

There are, however, certain situations when a man is obliged to tell the truth about the viciousness or fault of an individual behind his back. In doing so, he is motivated to eradicate the evil or mischief from society. For example, if a person, who offers his candidature for any public office, has a blemished past, it should be brought to the notice of the masses. To enquire about the antecedents of a person whom one intends to marry one's daughter cannot be described as prying into the secrets of others. And to provide correct information in this regard does not fall within the definition of backbiting. For, concealment of truth in these circumstances will be disastrous for the community and the individual.

To establish a morally sound social order is the cornerstone of Islamic teaching. This is possible only when the individuals are morally irreproachable. Man is vulnerable to vices. Islam has, therefore, in the first place, precluded the very channels of evil and mischief; and, secondly, it has provided detailed regulations to conduct his life. Man is not an angel and, therefore, it is too naïve to expect that he will steer clear of the vices tempting him persistently. This is not to say that he always succumbs to vices. But there are very few individuals who are likely to acquit themselves well in the midst of this temptation. This being so, Islam lays great stress on the reformation of individuals. It calls upon them to refrain from vices and mould their life as ordained by their Lord and His Apostle.

ON FLATTERY

The strength of Faith lies in having unshakable belief in Allāh as the arbiter of human destiny. Once this belief is shaken, man begins to rely upon his resources, setting aside moral and spiritual values. Material prosperity rather than spiritual elevation becomes the chief end of his life. To realize this, he resorts to all unlawful means. The values of life are determined by one's belief or disbelief in Allah and the concept of accountability on the Final Day of Requit. To a man whose primary aim in life is the satisfaction of 'self', he obliterates all distinction between the good and the evil. He is guided by the Machiavellian principle, that is, the end justifies the means. On the other hand, a man, whose main concern in life is to earn the pleasure of Allah, does not consider any sacrifice too great for himself.

To promote self-interest, man resorts to various means. Flattery is one of them. He adopts this strategy because he considers man rather than the Lord as the dispenser of profit or loss. This is repugnant to the spirit of Islam. The holy Quran expressly mentions, that "the decision rests with Allah only, Who hath commanded you that ye worship none save Him" (12:40). In the light of this pronouncement, he, who looks upon man as the arbiter of his fortune, has turned to be a renegade. The holy Prophet (peace be upon him), therefore, forbade lavishing undue praise on someone. Once a man praised someone in his presence, whereupon he remarked:

Woe be to thee, you have broken the neck of your friend, you have broken the neck of your friend. He said this twice. If one of you has to praise his friend at all, he should say: I think (him to be) so and Allah knows it well and I do not know the secret of the heart and Allah knows the destined end, and I cannot testify his purity against Allah but he appears to be so and so (*Muslim*).

On another occasion he commanded the believers to throw dust upon the faces of those, who shower too much (undue praise) (*Muslim*). Islam has sanctioned the appreciation of the good in man, but it should be within reasonable limits. Moreover, it should

be avoided in the presence of man. Undue praise often makes a man arrogant and turns his head.

Sycophancy is fatal for the flatterer as well as the flattered. By his obsequiousness, the former loses his self-respect and trustworthiness. He stakes everything – honour, conscience and independence – for petty benefits. This gradually leads him to a position where he becomes spiritually dead. He tolerates all injustices and corrupt practices without ever challenging them. As for the latter, intoxicated as he is by flattery, he cannot see the right course. He becomes so complacent that he cannot make a correct assessment of his worth and see things in clear perspective. The desire to be flattered is the greatest weakness of man. It has its origin in self-glorification and egoism. Man is a composite being consisting of two major forces: self (*nafs*) and soul (*ruh*). Purification of soul is inconceivable without the purification of self. Purification of self calls for unqualified submission to the will of Allah, restraint and patience. Love of flattery, since it is prompted by the desire to worship the self, is a satanic passion and a formidable obstacle in attaining spiritual illumination.

Flattery is often identified with respect. A flatterer justifies his action on the pretext of showing respect to the superior. Flattery and respect are, in fact, antithetical. The former is motivated by some material gain whereas the latter is motiveless. The former is lavished on those who are in a position to benefit others whereas the latter is respecter of no person. To respect others is a religious obligation while to shower undue praise is forbidden.

Flattery is another form of hypocrisy. A sycophant is sincere neither to himself nor to the person whom he flatters. He pretends to be honest and sincere to him but the fact is otherwise. A pretender is, therefore, a dangerous enemy, for he plays foul upon the man by presenting an exaggerated picture of his worth. The holy Quran strongly warns the hypocrites: "To the Hypocrites give/ The glad tidings that/ There is for them/ (But) a grievous penalty" (4:138).

To conclude, human relation should be based on sincerity and straightforwardness. If there is anything good to appreciate in someone, it should be done with moderation and balance. On the

other hand, if you find someone deviating from the course of justice you should not hesitate in pointing it out. Should you tolerate this, then it betrays your fear of man, which negates the fear of Allah.

ON FAVOURITISM

In the divine scheme of the universe, the principle of justice operates impeccably. Every living or non-living object, from the higher to the lower, is governed by the law of unity. But for this unity, the order and coherence in the universe and the smooth functioning of the different parts of human body would have been inconceivable. Likewise, the prosperity of society is contingent upon mutual support and co-operation among its members. The present crisis in the world is due to the absence of this goodwill and sympathy. In blind pursuit of self-interest, man has thrown overboard moral and spiritual values of life. To retrieve the world from this miserable plight, it is imperative for us to adhere to the principle of justice in all walks of life. In *Surah Al-Nisa*, verse 58, the holy Quran enjoins upon the believers to hold the scales even "While judging between man and man".

Injustice assumes many forms. It may find expression in disobedience to Allah and His Apostle. At times it manifests itself in neglecting the parents and the poor. All those acts which are intended to deprive the rightful claimants of their due fall within the purview of injustice. Favouritism is also an act of injustice. Unlike other acts of injustice, it involves two individuals, that is, donor and recipient of unfair advantage. Islam, therefore, condemns both of them. According to one Tradition, the holy Prophet (peace be upon him) said that the man who staked his salvation for the sake of other would be in the miserable condition on the Day of Judgment (*Mishkat*). On another occasion he said that one who spread racial or other prejudices or waged war on account of them or died in a state of prejudice, is not of me (*Abu-Dawood*). To discriminate between man and man on the basis of caste, colour and race is tantamount to perpetrating injustice and, therefore, Islam disapproves it.

In a society where favouritism becomes deep-rooted, public officers abuse their office and the institution of judiciary becomes the instruments of cruelty. This breeds discontent and hatred among the people and they gradually rise in open rebellion against the authority. History bears witness that people have always

revolted when they became the victims of gross injustice. To forestall this, the men at the helm must ensure even-handed justice for all. No rule, however foolproof it may be, can arrest the menace of favouritism unless the men holding the public offices are godfearing and conscientious. It is the fear of accountability on the Final Day of Reckoning that steers a man along the path of justice and righteousness. As long as the public offices are held by those who are sceptical about the concept of accountability, it is foolhardy to expect justice from them. In an Islamic polity, therefore, the government must entrust the public offices to those whose integrity is unquestionable.

To produce men of strong moral fiber, the education system in the Muslim world calls for revolutionary changes. The existing system, which is a legacy of colonial rule, has outlived its usefulness. It should, therefore, be reoriented on a sound Islamic foundation. Only then you can produce men who are morally invulnerable. With such persons as government functionaries, you can trust justice and equity. On a short term basis, the government may consider the moral orientation of the existing civil servants including police personnel. All government training academies should introduce a special course on Islamic Studies to acquaint the trainees with the fundamentals of Islamic faith and moral principles. It should be obligatory for them to observe Islamic shariah, and not indulge in immoral practices. At present training programmes for various services are confined to their specialized duties. It is assumed that trainees, since they are already Muslims by nomenclature, do not require further instruction in Islam. But, because of a lack of moral orientation they have no scruples in resorting to corrupt practices. If a few of these trainees are imbued with Islamic moral values, it is not due to the blessing of the training programme itself, but due to their inherent spiritual strength.

Favouritism has become so widespread that we have ceased to consider it an unusual phenomenon. Much of the present conflict and strife in the world owes to this. It engenders ill-will and a sense of insecurity. To overcome this evil, the first imperative is to restructure our education programme along Islamic line. It is only by means of this education that we can develop Allah-consciousness in our youth which would, in turn, keep them along the path of justice.

ON CONTENTMENT

The dictionary meaning of contentment is to remain satisfied with what one has and be not greedy of more. Contentment is one of the moral virtues which the holy Prophet (peace be upon him) enjoined upon his followers to cultivate. Discontentment makes life miserable; it betrays lack of faith in the divine dispensation of justice. The believers should, therefore, reconcile with their lot and refrain from complaining about want and insufficiency. Man's desires are unlimited, but the means to fulfil them are limited. His happiness, therefore, lies in submitting to the will of Allah and accepting what he has been blessed with. According to the holy Prophet (peace be upon him) "successful was he who was blessed by the Lord with the reality of Islam and was granted enough provision to sustain life and God, also, made him satisfied with it" (*Muslim*).

Happiness does not consist in material prosperity; the blessed man is he who is gifted with the wealth of Islam. Lust for wealth makes a man spiritually impoverished. In his pursuit of worldly possessions, he gradually sets aside moral and spiritual values of life. Contentment, on the other hand, strengthens faith and fosters piety and righteousness. "Prosperity", said the holy Prophet (peace be upon him), "does not come from worldly possessions, but real prosperity is the contentment of the heart" (*Bukhari*). We should therefore, guard ourselves against the vice of greediness because it deprives us of peace and happiness in life. A greedy man is always tormented by the thought that he has not got sufficient wealth while others are enjoying the riches of the world and leading a prosperous life. Avarice has corrosive impact not only on the moral fiber of the individual but also on society. The holy Prophet (peace be upon him), therefore, warned the believers against this evil passion:

Protect yourselves from greed because it has been the undoing of the earlier communities. It bade them to be miserly, and they became miserly; it bade them to sever the ties of kinship, i.e., infringe on the rights of relatives, and they severed the ties of kinship; it bade them to evil doing, and they took to evil-doing.... (*Abu Dawood*).

Avarice gives rise to miserliness which in turn leads to selfishness. Eventually the bond of human relation is ruptured. To overcome the passion of avarice and its concomitant vices, we should foster contentment. As long as we are dominated by these vices, we shall not be able to establish a happy social order based on the spirit of generosity and fellow-feeling.

Contentment should not, however, be misconstrued as being synonymous with inaction. It does not prevent a man from improving his lot. He should do his best to achieve a thing, but he should remember that his efforts alone cannot ensure success unless it is willed by Allah. He should, therefore, pray to Allah for His help in this regard. This is the true spirit of contentment. Once a man came to the holy Prophet (peace be upon him) and said: "O the Messenger of Allah! Should I tether my she-camel and then leave it to Allah or should I keep it unfastened and then leave it to Allah?" The holy Prophet (peace be upon him) replied: "First tether it and then leave it to Allah" (*Tirmidhi*)

The life of the holy Prophet (peace be upon him) best exemplifies the virtue of contentment. Although he was the king of Arabia, he always remained in want and insufficiency. He and his family often had to pass several days without food and had to content themselves with a handful of dates. In spite of this, he never complained. He was a contented and happy man both in prosperity and adversity. In his habits, he was extremely simple. His eating and drinking, his dress and his furniture, retained, even when he had reached the fullness of power, their almost primitive nature. The only luxury he indulged in was perfumes. He never craved for worldly riches and comforts of life. Had he wished them, there was none to prevent him from acquiring them. As the Messenger of Allah, he was only concerned with the dissemination of the divine message. This was the only passion of his life. All other considerations were subservient to it. And in fulfilling this obligation, he considered no sacrifice too great for himself.

ON PATIENCE

The Arabic word *sabr* has many shades of meaning, which it is impossible to comprehend in the English word 'patience'. It implies patience in the sense of being thorough, not hasty. It also means patient perseverance, constancy and firmness of purpose as well as cheerful attitude of resignation in sorrow, defeat or suffering. It is one of the best attributes of man which enable him to bear the hardships of life with courage and fortitude. It is a touchstone whereby you can determine the faith of man. If he endures the calamities of life with calm resignation, he remains faithful to Allah. On the other hand if he grumbles, he ceases to be faithful. Life is a mixture of pain and pleasure; they are destined by Allah as part of His scheme for the good of man.

The holy Prophet (peace be upon him) held very high opinion about this virtue. Patience, according to him, is half of faith. He was himself a monument of patience. In spite of the persecutions meted out to him by the enemies of Islam, he never gave way to despair nor did he ever curse them. He suffered their affronts, mockery and ridicule cheerfully. In the midst of the severest opposition and apparent helplessness he remained steadfast to his mission. This shows his unflinching faith in Allah as the Protector from the evil designs of the enemies.

Patience expiates man's sins. Allah tests his allegiance by putting him in distress and affliction. If he forebears them with calm resignation, he acquits successfully through this trial and there is great reward for him. The holy Prophet said:

Whoever is faced with an economic or physical distress and does not reveal it to anyone or gives utterance to his grief or discontent before the people, it is due from God that He forgave him (his sin) (*Tabrani*).

The greater the trial, the greater will be the reward for man provided he does not deviate from the course of piety and righteousness. Affliction, says the holy Prophet (peace be upon him), should not be looked upon as a curse from Allah but as an expression of His love for man or community because it cleanses the heart of impurities and sins. In a state of distress man turns towards Allah as a penitent

and invokes His mercy and forgiveness. When Zainab, the daughter of the holy Prophet (peace be upon him), sent him the message to come immediately as the condition of her child was precarious, he admonished her in these words:

Oh daughter! Whatever God takes from anyone, He takes what is His, and whatever God gives to anyone, He gives what is His. In short everything belongs to God. And for everything, there is a time and a limit pre-determined by the Lord. (When the time comes, it is taken away from the world). So, be patient and pray to God for recompense (*Bukhari and Muslim*).

On being implored again by her to come, the holy Prophet (peace be upon him) along with sa'ad bin Obadah and other Companions (May Allah be pleased with them) proceeded to Zainab's house. When the holy Prophet (peace be upon him) reached there, he lifted the child and placed in his arms. It was gasping for breath. The holy Prophet (peace be upon him) was moved to tears on seeing its condition. Sa'ad bin Obadah then asked: 'What is it?' The holy Prophet (peace be upon him) replied:

It is the effect of compassion the Lord has bestowed upon the hearts of His bondsmen, and the Mercy of God will be on the bondsmen in whose hearts there is pity. (They will not be deserving of His kindness whose hearts are devoid of compassion) (*Bukhari and Muslim*).

Shedding of tears at a distressing event is not contrary to patience. It is the natural outcome of the sentiment of kindness with which Allah has blessed the human heart. A man who is devoid of sympathy and compassion incurs the wrath of Allah and deserves to be condemned. What patience signifies is that we should submit unreservedly to the will of Allah in the face of hardships and calamities and despair not of His mercy. But so far as the expressions of grief are concerned, they are not opposed to the spirit of fortitude.

Patience confers dignity and honour on man. Those who are bereft of this attribute lead an ignoble life. Impatience usually makes a man revengeful; it drives away the peace of mind and happiness of life. It overwhelms him with fear and pain and thereby renders him incapable of facing the odds of life. On the other hand, the man who is gifted with the virtue of patience faces the challenge of life with courage and endurance.

ON FULFILLING A PROMISE

In *Surah Al-Baqrah*, verse 208, the holy Quran commands the believers to "enter completely into the fold of Islam". The word 'Islam' connotes complete submission to the Will of Allah. 'To enter completely into fold of Islam', therefore, implies that we regulate the entire gamut of our life according to the divine commandment. Thus we can bring about harmony between profession and practice. Islam does not sanction the splitting up of human life into separate compartments, governing one according to the tenets of Islam and exempting others. The dichotomy between words and actions smacks of hypocrisy which is strongly condemned by Islam.

To honour commitment is a practical manifestation of trustworthiness. The holy Prophet (peace be upon him) enjoined upon the faithful to keep every engagement and fulfil the promise they have made. To fulfil one's promises is one of the few moral virtues about which he said that he could give the assurance of forgiveness in the Next world to those who possessed them. Breach of promise, on the other hand, is one of the symptoms of hypocrisy. The Apostle of Allah (peace be upon him) said: "The signs of a hypocrite are three: when he speaks, he is false; when he promises he fails; and when he is trusted, he betrays" (*Bukhari and Muslim*).

The fulfilment of promise being obligatory for the believer, he should carefully weigh, before making any commitment, whether or not he will be able to honour it. However, if he fails to fulfil his pledge due to unforeseen circumstances, he will not be sinful. This is evidenced from the following Tradition of the holy Prophet (peace be upon him): "If a person promises his brother to visit him, and it is also his intention to do so, but, (owing to some reason), he cannot go at the appointed time then there is no sin on him" (*Abu Dawood and Tirmidhi*).

Man's action is determined by his intention. If he fails to keep his promise, despite his best intention, owing to intractable circumstances, he will not be called to account on the Day of

Judgment. But if this failure is motivated by deception, he will be guilty of a breach of promise.

Falsehood assumes many forms. Non-fulfilment of promise is one of them. It undermines the credibility of man and betrays his lack of Faith. Promise is a kind of debt which must be repaid. Otherwise he will be a defaulter. In an Islamic polity, there is no scope for such a man to hold any public office. Fulfilment of promise is a divine attribute. In the scheme of the universe there is ample evidence of this attribute. While creating man, Allah promised to sustain as well as guide him. In fulfilment of this promise, He regulated the universe with perfect harmony and order, provided all the necessities of life, and furnished guidance through the Prophets. Life on this earth would not have been possible without them and man would have been groping in darkness without proper guidance. Since the Creator of the universe Himself has such a great regard for His promise, it is only appropriate for us to cultivate this attribute. By breaking his promise, man not only dishonours himself but also causes distress to others.

The life of the holy Prophet (peace be upon him) best exemplifies this divine attribute. Even in the midst of extremely adverse circumstances, he never violated his pledge. According to the Treaty of Hyudybiah, he was obliged to return any one who went over to him without the permission of his guardian. It was during this time that Abu Jandal, the son of Suhayl, appeared before the Prophet. He was brutally chained and was staggering with privation and fatigue. The Prophet and his Companions were moved to pity. It was a crucial test of his word of honour. In silent resignation he, therefore, returned Abu Jandal to his father and consoled thus:

Be patient; resign yourself to the Will of Allah. Allah is going to provide for you and your helpless Companions relief and means of escape. We have concluded a treaty of peace with them and we have taken the pledge in the name of Allah. We are, therefore, under no circumstances prepared to break it (Ibn Hisham, Vol.3, p.33).

In the conflict-ridden world of today, the teachings of Islam alone can steer it on the road to peace and security. One of the reasons why the peace treaties have often failed to deliver the goods is the lack of respect on the part of the warring nations for their commitment. This in turn betrays their moral and spiritual decadence.

ON REJOICING AT THE MISFORTUNE OF OTHERS

Islam teaches love and sympathy among the fellow-beings. The Muslims are like a single body. If any part of it is afflicted with disease, the whole body aches. Likewise, if the member of a Muslim community suffers, it should be a matter of concern for others. To strengthen the bond of Islamic fraternity, the believers should stand by each other in crisis and distress. Man owes obligations to Allah as well as to the fellow-creatures. If he fails to fulfil his obligations to Allah, He may, in His infinite mercy, forgive him. But so far as the human rights are concerned, Allah will never forgive the defaulter unless the person who suffers deprivation himself forgives him. Mutual love and affection is, therefore, central to the teachings of Islam. On it depends the prosperity and happiness of society.

To rejoice at the suffering of others, even if they be your inveterate enemy, is contrary to the spirit of Islam. We should rather be grateful to Allah for His gesture of kindness in not afflicting us with that distress. A man who takes delight in the misfortune of others only invites the wrath of Allah. Should he persist in this vicious habit, it is quite likely that he may be overtaken by those afflictions which befell others. The holy Prophet (peace be upon him), therefore, warned: "Do not rejoice at the misfortune of a brother. (It is quite possible) that, (as a result of it), God delivered him of his misfortune and afflicted you with it (*Tirmidhi*).

Man, according to the holy Quran, is the noblest creature of Allah. He is invested with those traits which are peculiar to Allah Himself. Compassion, tolerance and forbearance: these are some of the divine attributes. As His bondsmen, it is only desirable that we regulate our human relation with these attributes. Whoever wishes Allah to be kind and compassionate to him should be kind and compassionate to others. Kindness is the most commendable of human virtues and one who is devoid of this quality is virtually a brute. According to the holy Prophet (peace be upon him), the

Fire of Hell is forbidden to him who is mild and gentle, and feels warmly for others (*Abu Dawood and Tirmidhi*).

There is a tendency among us to look upon affliction and distress as a divine punishment. Far from this, they often prove to be a blessing in disguise. Allah tests the loyalty of the pious in various ways. At times they are subjected to heavy loss of wealth. Some time they undergo the pang of suffering because of the death of their children. Those who bear these afflictions with patience and fortitude come out successful in their trial; whereas those who become despondent and deviate from the course of piety in the midst of these misfortunes betray their disloyalty to Allah. Loyalty to Allah demands unqualified submission to His will. Whether in prosperity or adversity, the faithful should remain steadfast and firm in their devotion to Allah. Even the prophets were not exempt from this process of trial. The Prophet Abraham was commanded to sacrifice his son as a test of his allegiance to the Lord.

To the pious and the faithful, the misfortune serves as a touchstone of their loyalty to Allah. As for the sinful and misguided people, the calamities serve as a warning. Should they heed this warning and amend themselves, they are likely to be exonerated from the distress in future. If they persist in their defiance to divine Authority, in spite of repeated warnings, their fate will be the same as that of Beni Israel. The history of Beni Israel is a standing reproof to all nations. They represent a people who deviated from the path of divine revelations and came to a dismal end. Their history reflects the universal principle that nations rise to great heights when they follow the right path and decline to slavery when they deviate from that path.

To conclude, the misfortune of the deviant should serve as an eye-opener to us. Instead of rejoicing at his affliction, we should take stock of ourselves and amend our lapses, if any, lest we should also be the victim of his fate. In moments of distress, the faithful should remain patient and seek divine assistance to deliver them of this crisis.

ON BEARING FALSE WITNESS

In any Judicial systems evidence plays an important part. On it depends the administration of justice. A plaintiff, however trustworthy and virtuous he may be, cannot establish his claim without adequate evidence. If he fails to produce convincing evidence, the court cannot give its verdict in his favour simply on the basis of his claim. To pronounce judgment in favour of a plaintiff without proof will be a travesty of justice. This will encourage persons to come out with all sorts of claim and the court will be hard put to it to decide them. The edifice of Islamic Jurisprudence is, therefore, structured along sound evidence. Even in such offences as fornications or adultery, the court cannot impose punishment without adequate evidence. Underlining the need for evidence, the Apostle of Allah (peace be upon him) said:

If judgment is given in favour of persons simply on the basis of complaint, they will begin to use others (freely) and make all sorts of charges (against them), in respect of life and property. But no case can be decided in anyone's favour (simply on his complaint). (Evidence will have to be produced, and, in case it is not forthcoming), the defendant will be called upon to deny the charge on oath (*Muslim*).

So far as the production of evidence is concerned, Islam does not discriminate between the Muslims and the non-Muslims. Ash'as bin Qais jointly owned a plot of land with a Jew. The Jew repudiated his claim and became the sole owner of the land. Ash'as then took him to the Apostle of Allah (peace be upon him) and presented the case before him. The holy Prophet (peace be upon him) asked Ash'as if he had any evidence to prove his claim. He replied in the negative. The holy Prophet (peace be upon him) thereupon, told the Jew that, if he did not admit Ash'as's claim, he should declare on oath that the land belonged solely to him. Ash'as, then, told the holy Prophet (peace be upon him) that the Jew would take a false oath and arrogate his property. Upon this, the following verse was revealed:

As for those who sell / The faith they owe to God / And their own
plighted word / For a small price / They shall have no portion / In
the Hereafter: / Nor will God (deign to) speak to them / Or look at

them / On the Day of judgment, / Nor will He cleanse them / (Of sin): they shall have / A grievous Penalty (3:77).

While evidence is essential for dispensation of justice, there is severe punishment for those who bear false witness or swear false oath to prove their claim. Swearing of oath is a kind of covenant with Allah. Those who take false oath, in fact, violate this covenant. He will show kindness and mercy to the ordinary sinners but there is no mercy for those who are in active rebellion against Him. The holy Prophet (peace be upon him) also warned the believers against false swearing: "Whoever appropriated the right of a Muslim by swearing a false oath (and acquired his property without right), (from court), Allah made the Fire of Hell inevitable for him and debarred him from entering Paradise."

Bearing false witness is a sin not only against Allah but also against society. It promotes injustice multiplying human miseries. The predicament of the present world lies in its unscrupulousity in bearing witness. Even for paltry gain the people resort to lies and falsehood. Consequently, the judiciary has become the instrument of cruelty and tyranny. On the basis of false witness, the culprits go scot free whereas the innocent suffer. There is no law, except the fear of accountability on the Day of Resurrection, which can prevent a man from bearing false witness. Islam has, therefore, forewarned the believers of the consequence of false witness.

Evidence being essential to the administration of justice, the believers have been enjoined to bear testimony to the real facts of the case. It is unlawful to conceal a fact within their knowledge. The holy Quran commands them not to refuse witness when they are called on for evidence (2:282). In Islam the depositions of every individual are not worthy of trust. Only persons of high integrity enjoying public credibility should be summoned to bear witness.

In Islam, the judiciary serves as the custodian of human rights. It ensures even-handed justice to the people. To fulfil this obligation, they must co-operate and guide the courts of justice by providing correct evidence. Should one withhold the fact from the court, this will be a breach of trust and a disservice to the fellow-beings. For the believers, therefore, it is incumbent to provide evidence conscientiously, even if they are required to bear it against their dear ones.

ON THE CURSE OF MALICIOUSNESS

To revile others and to nurse rancour against them are contrary to the spirit of Islam. They are the most condemnable attributes in man which render the virtuous action void. Malicious persons gloat over the distress and misfortune of their opponents. They spare no opportunity to let them down and hurt their sentiments. This attitude is unbecoming of a true believer. Islam teaches forgiveness and magnanimity even under the most provoking circumstances. Kindness and sympathy win over the most inveterate enemies, whereas malice alienates them. The holy Prophet (peace be upon him) admonished his followers to refrain from malice because it consumes the virtues just as fire consumes fuels (*Abu Dawood*). On another occasion he is reported to have said:

The deeds of men are produced (before God) on two days each week: Monday and Thursday... and the decision of forgiveness is taken for (all) Believers except the two who bear malice against each other. As regards them, the command is given to leave them, that is, not to write about them that they have been forgiven until they have cleaned their hearts of ill-will (*Muslim*).

A malicious person does not deserve divine mercy unless he purges his heart of malice and ill-will. His repentance is not acceptable unless he forbears from this sinful habit. Malice assumes various forms. Suspicion, mistrust, contemptuous upbraiding, scandal-mongering and backbiting: they are all motivated by ill-will against others. Malice is the mother of all these evils which are highly detrimental to good and friendly relations. They engender bitterness and hostility among the brethren-in-faith.

Islam was revealed to foster the bond of human relation. In the pre-Islamic era, the Arabs were characterized by tribal hostility and jealousy which led to bloody feuds. With the emergence of Islam, these discordant elements were welded into a harmonious whole. When the holy Prophet (peace be upon him) migrated to Medina, his first task was to restore order in the Peninsula, organizing it on a sound moral basis. He taught the people not only

the glory and beneficence of Allah but also the brotherly love, kindness to children, widows and orphans and gentleness to animals. His teaching helped achieve a new fraternity among the Muslims of Mecca and those of Medina. This brotherhood was indeed unique in the history of the world. The fellow-feeling and love on which the new relationship was established found a wonderful expression. For example, Sa'd b. Sabi, a Helper, said to his fellow brother, Abd Al-Rahman b. Awf: "I have two wives. I am ready to divorce one, and after the expiry of *'iddah*, you may marry her". But Abd al-Rahman b. Awf declined to accept this offer. Instead he requested his brother to direct him to the market so that he could earn his own livelihood. The atmosphere of brotherhood and fellow-feeling created by the holy Prophet (peace be upon him) produced very healthy result. Age-long enmities among the different tribes, especially those that had existed between the *Aws* and the *Khazraj* were almost forgotten among the converts from those tribes. The holy Quran refers to this brotherhood as a great boon:

And hold fast, / Allah together, by the Rope / Which God
(stretches out / For you), and be not divided / Among yourselves;
/ And remember with gratitude / God's favour on you; / For ye
were enemies / And He joined your hearts / In love, so that by His
Grace, / You became brethren; / And ye were on the brink / Of
the Pit of Fire, / And He saved from it (3:103)

The holy Prophet (peace be upon him) succeeded in establishing a social pattern which was free from mutual hostility and rancour on the basis of spiritual relationship to Allah. He advised the people to strengthen this relationship. The stronger is this relationship, the more warm-hearted and affable they will be. Allah is compassionate and likes toleration and forbearance. He, therefore, wants His bondsmen to cultivate these attributes. The divine blessings befall those who are kind-hearted and benevolent to others. It is, therefore, in our own interest to be warm-hearted and compassionate to fellow-beings. Whoever wishes Allah to be compassionate to him and fulfil his wants should show compassion to others and make tolerance the rule of his life.

ON THE TREATMENT OF CAPTIVES AND SERVANTS

The pre-Islamic era in Arabia and the rest of the world was characterized by absence of human values. It was an age when the institution of slavery had become deep-rooted in almost all over the world. The prisoners of war were subjected to inhuman atrocities. The conquering nations treated them as 'commodity' rather than as human beings. With the emergence of Islam, they were retrieved from this humiliating treatment. It was but for the teachings of Islam that the entire course of their life was transformed. The holy Prophet (peace be upon him) described the freeing of slaves as an act of highest virtue and an atonement for sin. He also admonished his followers to be magnanimous in their dealings with the captives. Their basic needs such as food and clothing should be met and they should be treated in a humane and kindly manner. It is reported upon the authority of Abu Zar Ghifari that the Apostle of Allah (peace be upon him) said:

(Your slaves) are your brothers. Allah has placed them under your authority. So, he who has a brother under him should feed and clothe him as he does himself and avoid taking from him work that is beyond his power, and if he does tell him to do such things then he should also join in it (*Bukhari and Muslim*).

The above Tradition sums up the core of Islamic teachings apropos of the rights of captives. Islam was revealed to eliminate the distinction between man and man. It aimed at democratizing the relation between the master and the slave. The latter, since he is under the control of the former, should be treated in a just and fair manner. Should the master commit excesses in his treatment with the captives and servants, he will be guilty of grievous sin against Allah. Man, however insignificant he may be, is a creature of Allah. Love of Allah obliges us to love His creature, regardless of his worldly position.

The magnanimous treatment accorded to the prisoners of war by the holy Prophet (peace be upon him) and his Companions is unique in the history of mankind. They showed this nobility in spite of many hardships and persecutions they had to endure at the hands of the Quraysh of Mecca. When it became impossible for

them to live in their native place, they were obliged to seek shelter into a far-off place. The Meccans did not allow them to lead a life of peace even in their new abodes. They fell upon them with all their force in order to exterminate them completely. Allah willed otherwise and they were defeated by a small army of Muslims. Amidst such bitterness and ill-feelings, the holy Prophet (peace be upon him) remained calm and self-possessed. He did not perpetrate atrocity upon the prisoners. Out of the 72 captives only two were executed, namely, al-Nadr b. al-Harith and Uqbah b. Abi Muya'th who were notorious for their unrelenting hostility towards the Muslims. The rest of the captives were treated with kindness and sympathy. It was because of this noble gesture that some of the captives embraced Islam and were therefore immediately set free.

The holy Prophet (peace be upon him) bracketed the rights of the captives with the observance of prayer. His last word, as reported by Hazrat Ali (May Allah's blessings be upon him), were: "Observe *Namaz* ! Observe *Namaz* ! And fear Allah as regards your selves and servants" (*Abu Dawood*). That the holy Prophet (peace be upon him) had the rights of the captives and servants dear are revealed from this last testament.

The ransom of each prisoner varied according to his financial position. The poor who could not pay were freed without any compensation. Those who could read and write were entrusted a group of small children. When the children were proficient in reading and writing, their instructor was granted liberty.

Islam enjoins upon its adherents to fulfil their obligations to one another. The masters should be fair and generous to their captives and servants and the latter should be faithful and obedient to the former. The Apostle of Allah (peace be upon him) said: "When a slave is faithful to his master, and, also, worships the Lord, he is deserving of a double reward (in the Hereafter)" (*Bukhari and Muslims*). The central theme of the holy Prophet's teachings is that every individual should fulfil the rights of others with a full sense of responsibility, inasmuch as it is rewarding in both the worlds. The root cause of the predicament in the present world is that every individual wants to secure his own rights without fulfilling his obligations to others. Such an attitude is by no means conducive to peace and happiness in society.

ON THE RIGHTS OF MUSLIMS

In *Surah Al-Nahl*, verse 90, the holy Quran says: "God commands justice, the doing / Of good, and liberality of kith/ And kin, and He forbids/ All shameful deeds, and injustice/ And rebellion."

In the above verse, there are three instructions for the believers on which depends the establishment of a just social order. In the first place, they have been commanded to deal out justly in distributing the rights of their fellow-beings. The concept of justice demands a fair and reasonable balance and right proportion, not equal distribution of rights. The claims of every individual should be so determined as to ensure his moral, social, economic, legal, political, and personal rights. Secondly, the believers have been ordered to do good to the fellow-creatures. The concept of '*ishan*' covers what is right, good, gentle and beautiful. It demands generosity, forbearance, co-operation, gratitude, compassion and respect for others. *Ishan* is a superior attribute to justice. If justice removes bitterness and discontent from society, *Ishan* adds beauty and grandeur to it. Thirdly, the faithful have been enjoined to be kind and compassionate to their relatives. This is yet another from of *Ishan*. To Show 'liberality to the kith and kin' does not simply imply sharing the joys and griefs of the relatives. The well-off individuals should also share their wealth with the poor relatives. Islam makes it incumbent upon the affluent persons in the family to look after them.

The concept of justice and *ishan* which have been outlined in the verse mentioned above, are not confined to the kith and kin. They rather extend to the Muslims as a whole. The Muslims, irrespective of colour, caste, language and nationality, form one community. It is the tie of religion which binds them into an Islamic fraternity. Before the emergence of Islam, the Arabs were divided into different clans. They were so uncompromising and hostile that they had no scruples in shedding the blood of one another on flimsy grounds. This led to interminable hostilities among different tribes. It was due to the blessing of Islam that they were delivered from this miserable plight.

The brethren-in-faith should stand by one another through thick and thin. They should not assume the posture of indifference and coldness towards the poor and the needy. The believers are like one body. If a part of it suffers, the whole body aches. The health of body depends on the co-operation of its different parts. Similarly, the happiness and prosperity of Muslim community depend upon the co-operation and help among its members.

To establish the bond of Islamic brotherhood, the believers should tenaciously safeguard the rights of each other. They should not even demur in sacrificing their own interest for the sake of others. It was this spirit of co-operation and self-sacrifice which strengthened the ties of brotherhood amongst the Muslims of Medina and the emigrants from Mecca and eliminated the age-long tribal hostilities between the *Aws* and the *Khazraj*. Selfishness, jealousy, rancour and hatred breed dissension and strife. The holy Prophet (peace be upon him) therefore declared them unlawful: "Neither nurse mutual hatred, nor jealousy, nor enmity, but become fellow-brothers and servants of Allah. It is not lawful for a Muslim to keep his relations estranged with his brother beyond three days" (*Muslim*).

The holy Prophet (peace be upon him) also admonished his followers to refrain from abusing, backbiting, insulting, finding faults and fighting against the Muslims. It is rather obligatory for them to conceal the faults of others to save them from humiliation and disgrace:

Oppress not the believers, nor revile them, nor follow their secrets because who follows the secrets of his Muslim brother, Allah will follow his secrets and whose secrets are followed by Allah, He puts him in disgrace even though he is in the interior of his habitation (*Tirmidhi*)

Islam teaches forbearance and patience. Despite the greatest provocation, the true believers should remain calm and self-composed. Enmity should be returned with love and affection. Thus you can win the divine favour and grace. The holy Qurān promises "the mercy of Allah to those who do good" (7:56). A believer is a believer's mirror; and a believer is a believer's brother, said the Apostle of Allah (peace be upon him) (*Abu Dawood*). In the light of this Tradition, a Muslim should inform

his brother of any fault or weakness he may observe in him with a sincere heart and refrain from spreading it. Since a 'believer is a believer's brother', it is his duty to protect him, to the best of his ability, from any evil or danger.

ON CASTING AMOROUS GLANCES.

Islam intends to keep the social environment clean of all sorts of sexual excitement and stimulation. To realize this objective, it has ordered the segregation of sexes and observance of purdah for woman. Promiscuous mixing of the opposite sexes, since it provides opportunities for stirring our baser passion, is forbidden by Islam. Coupled with this the feminine urge for the display of beauty, except in the presence of husband, is also prohibited. As additional safeguard, Islam enjoins upon its adherents to cultivate self-purification. The processes of self-purification involves a sound faith in Islam. Belief in Allah, His Book and His Prophet obliges the believer to abide by the their commandments. This faith calls for refraining from obscenity and sexual promiscuity as well as keeping the heart clean of evil thoughts. As in other spheres of life, the correct and complete obedience to the divine ordinance depends upon one's faith in Islam, so it is in the moral and social sphere as well. This being so, man has first been invited to have unshakable belief in Islam, and then provided moral instructions for his guidance in life.

The scheme for spiritual reform, which Islam provides to man, consists in the concept of '*haya*'. Literally, '*haya*' means shyness. In Islamic parlance, it implies the guilty conscience which a wrong-doer feels. The pang of consciousness serves as a moral deterrent against all evil inclination. The moral teachings of Islam, therefore, aim at keeping this conscience alive in human nature. The more a man drifts away from the anchor of Islam, the more his conscience becomes dead, which, in turn, emboldens him to commit sins with impunity. The holy Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "When you do not have '*haya*' you may do whatever you please."

There are certain moral lapses which are too hidden to fall within the jurisdiction of law. For example, casting amorous glances at the woman, relishing the sweetness of her voice with the ears, drawing pleasure of the tongue by conversing: they are all immoral acts and spring from hidden motives of man. They are beyond the purview of law. The only deterrent force that can

restrain man from these vices is his own conscience. Of these moral aberrations the evil look is the worst culprit. The holy Quran, therefore, warned the believers against this:

Say to the believing man / That they should lower / Their gaze and guard / Their modesty: that will make / For greater purity for them: / And God is well acquainted / With all that they do / And say to the believing woman / That they should lower / Their gaze and guard / Their modesty (24:30-31).

The rule of modesty applies to man as well as woman. A brazen stare, whether by man or woman at each other, is a breach of refined manners and, therefore, both of them have been admonished to 'lower their gaze and guard their modesty'. However, on account of the difference of sexes, a greater amount of privacy is required for woman than man, especially in matter of dress and the uncovering of the bosom. The holy Prophet (peace be upon him) also advised his followers to forbear from casting amorous glances at woman: "Son of Adam, your first (unintentional) look is pardonable. But beware that you do not cast the second look" (*Al-Jassas*.) On another occasion he said to Hazrat Ali: "O, Ali, do not cast a second look after the first one. The first look is pardonable, but not the second" (*Abu-Dawood*.)

Closely linked with this evil is the feminine urge to display her beauty. This urge finds expression in the selection of pleasing, gauzy and bright clothes and fancy hairdos. The holy Quran describes these practices as *Tabarruj-i-Jahiliyyah*. All beautification and make-up that is intended to please others than the husband falls within the definition of *Tabarruj-i-Jahiliyyah*. The holy Quran has therefore enjoined upon the woman to refrain from this practice: "..... and make not / A dazzling display, like / That of the former Times / Of Ignorance" (3:33).

Islam regulates every facet of human life. To establish a morally sound social order, it is imperative for us to abide by the moral teachings of Islam. It is not enough to know the teachings of Islam but also to practise them without any reservations. In the West, the sex life suffers from lack of discipline. The right of individual freedom entitles every man and woman to enter into extramarital relations. Islam does not approve such unrestricted freedom. In Islam, freedom is always circumscribed by obligations.

ON GENTLENESS OF SPEECH

According to Hazrat Ayesha (May Allah be pleased with her), once some Jews called on the Apostle of Allah (peace be upon him) greeting him with *As-Samm-o-Alaikum*, that is, death be with you. On realising the meaning and intention of their salutation, she retorted: "May it be with you, and the curse of Allah." The holy Prophet (peace be upon him) was displeased with this retort. He admonished her to be polite and to guard herself against the foulness of speech (*Bukhari*). This Tradition exemplifies two important principles of Islamic teachings. First, that it is unbecoming of a true believer to be impolite and discourteous in his speech; secondly, discourtesy should not be paid with discourtesy. The life of the holy Prophet (peace be upon him) was himself an embodiment of nobility and refinement of manners and speech. Anas, his faithful servant, remained with him for ten years. During all this period the holy Prophet (peace be upon him) never said even 'fie to him'. The worst expression he ever made use of was: 'What has come to him! May his forehead become darkened with mud!' When asked to curse someone, he replied: "I have not been sent to curse but to be a mercy to mankind." He was the sweetest and most agreeable in conversation.

Gentleness of speech is one of the attributes of great social significance. It has far-reaching effects on promoting cordial and friendly relation. More often, the human relation is marred by the use of intemperate language. It is beneath the dignity of a true believer to indulge in indecent language even in the face of great provocations. To revile and resort to coarse and filthy speech at the time of a dispute is the symptom of a hypocrite. Islam teaches us to be polite and gentle even with those who are uncivil to us. If we pay incivility in the same coin, this will alienate people from us and we shall render ourselves unworthy in the sight of Allah. On the other hand, if we return impoliteness with politeness, we shall in the long run win the love and sympathy of the person who had been discourteous and ungentle to us. Politeness, therefore, costs nothing but pays more. "To speak gently is (a kind of charity)", said the holy Prophet (peace be upon him). To talk to anyone in a

polite and pleasing manner is by itself a reward for it brings joy to the heart.

The believers have also been enjoined to restrain from irresponsible talk, because it often gives rise to bickering and strife. If there is nothing useful or good to say, it is better to keep quiet. It is among the important teachings of the holy Prophet (peace be upon him) upon which, as he tells us, depends the salvation of man. M'uad relates that one day he requested the holy Prophet (peace be upon him) to tell him the ways and means of gaining admission to Heaven. He replied that prayer, fasting, *Zakat* and pilgrimage were the "door of goodness" but they were of no values without the control of the tongue (*Tirmidhi* and *Ibn-i-Maja*). The indiscretions of the tongue deprive the good acts of their virtue. When Hazrat M'uad expressed his surprise at it and wanted to know if men would also be called to account for what they said, the holy Prophet (peace be upon him) replied that people would go to Hell mostly owing to the sins they committed with their tongues.

Today the major sins and transgressions in the society are due to the lack of restraint on the tongue. The indiscreet use of tongue often embitters human relation. To establish cordial relations, it is desirable that we exercise restraint on our tongue. This is not to say that we should be tongue-tied. Islam teaches us to use our tongue discriminately. We should speak only when it is necessary and that too in such a manner as not to hurt the feeling of others. Taciturnity is often a blessing in disguise. It saves a man from being exposed to many vices. We should not refute others unless what they say is opposed to the teachings of Islam. In addition, we should be mild and soft-spoken. It was this attitude of the holy Prophet (peace be upon him) which helped him to win over his worst enemies. Following in his footsteps, we should also refrain from being sharp-tongued and foul-mouthed. This will be rewarding in this world as well as in the world hereafter.

ON FORGIVENESS

In *Surah Al-i-Imran*, verse 134, the holy Quran says: "Those who spend (freely), / Whether in prosperity, / Or in adversity; / Who restrain anger, / And pardon (all men); -- / For God loves those / Who do good;" In this verse, the believers have been ordained to 'restrain anger' and to 'pardon all men' because Allah 'loves those who do good'. Anger and forgiveness cannot co-exist. In a state of anger man loses control over himself and, therefore, he is driven towards revenge. This being so, he is first instructed to control anger and then to grant forgiveness.

Forgiveness is a divine attribute. In *Surah-Al-Fatiha*, the Lord of the universe is described as the most merciful and compassionate. His mercy and beneficence is evidenced from the fact that He does not discriminate between the believers and unbelievers in providing the basic necessities of life. When a man commits wrong Allah gives respite to amend himself. Whoever turns towards Him as a penitent Allah forgives him.

The life of the holy Prophet (peace be upon him) best exemplifies the spirit of forgiveness and self-restraint. Throughout his life he never cursed anyone. In spite of the great persecutions by the Meccans, he offered general clemency to them. He was the "Mercy unto the world" and, therefore, he forgave even his deadliest enemies. It was in this spirit of clemency that he entered the city of Mecca. The city which had once treated him so cruelly now lay at his feet. His old persecutors were now completely at his mercy. But in the hour of triumph, every evil suffered was forgotten. The army also followed his example. It did not behave like the conquering army. It entered the city gently and peaceably. No house was looted and no woman was insulted.

Forgiveness lies in foregoing the claim to which one is entitled as a matter of right. If you revenge an injustice or insult, you are on the same level as your enemies. But if you show forbearance towards the enemies, you are superior to them. It shows the magnanimity of heart. It is an effective weapon to win over the opponents. It helps establish a social order free from animosity and

vengeance. Vengeance breeds vengeance whereas forgiveness promotes love and affection. According to Abu Huraira (May Allah be pleased with him), the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said that Hazrat Musa (peace be upon him) asked his Lord who was the most honourable of His servants. He replied: "He who pardons when he is in a position of power" (*Baihaqi*). The holy Prophet (peace be upon him) is also reported to have said: "Charity does not in any way decrease the wealth and (the respect of) the servant who forgives. Allah adds to his respect and the one who shows humility, Allah elevates him in the estimation of the people" (*Muslim*).

Islam does not, however, recognize forgiveness on all occasions. For one thing, it will embolden the offenders; for another, it will promote evil in society. Punishment becomes inevitable if the offender proves to be incorrigible. Forgiveness is permissible when the defaulter is repentant and amends himself. In Islam, there is no scope for unconditional forgiveness or non-resistance to evil-doers. In the divine scheme of forgiveness, the transgressor's repentance is acceptable only when he holds out the promise to reform himself. If he does not honour his commitment with Allah and persists in his transgression, the divine retribution operates without further respite. The holy Quran explained this in the following verse: "The recompense for an injury / Is an injury equal thereto / (In degree): but if a person/ Forgives and makes reconciliation, / His reward is due/ From God (42:40).

The holy Prophet (peace be upon him) himself ordered the execution of Abdullah b. Khatal, Miqyas b. Hubaba, Huwayrith and one singing girl. Abdullah was executed for killing a helpless slave and joining the Arab pagans as an apostate; Miqyas, for killing an Ansari and turning an apostate. Their offence was of such a serious magnitude that they could not be forgiven.

The edifice of an Islamic social order is structured along the principle of love, sympathy and co-operation. You cannot conceive of developing the spirit of love and co-operation in a society where people are desperate to slake their thirst for vengeance. Islam therefore, enjoins upon its adherents to promote self-restraint and forbearance. The divine ordinance of forgiveness does not, however, rule out punishment, if the offenders prove to be stubborn and past reform.

ON THEFT

Broadly speaking, there are two means of income: lawful and unlawful. All those transactions are lawful in which the exchange of benefit between the parties concerned is just and equitable. On the other hand, the wealth which is acquired at the expense of others is unlawful. Islam sanctions the one whereas it condemns the other. It does not accord unrestricted freedom to its followers to acquire wealth by whatever means they like. As in other departments of life, it has provided guidance in the world of commerce and trade as well. The divine ordinance in this respect is as follows:

O ye who believe / Eat not up your property / Among yourselves
in vanities: / But let there be amongst you / Traffic and trade / By
mutual good-will: / Nor kill (or destroy) Yourselves: for verily /
God hath been to you / Most Merciful! (4:29).

The believers have been warned not to defraud others. They are admonished to carry on trade with the mutual consent of the parties concerned, that is, they should honour their commitment and refrain from violence against each other. Should they indulge in illegal traffic, this will be suicidal for them.

Theft is one of the unlawful means of acquiring wealth because it deprives the rightful owner of his belongings without any justifiable reason. The thieves pose a serious threat to the life and property of the individuals. Islam, therefore, ordains exemplary punishment for stealing: "As to the thief,/ Male or female,/ Cut off his or her hands:/ A punishment by way/ Of example, from God,/ For their crime:/ And God is exalted in Power" (5:38)

There is difference of opinion among the jurists as to the value of the property stolen; which would involve the punishment of cutting off the hand. The majority holds that petty thefts are exempt from this punishment. The general opinion is that only one hand should be cut off for the first theft.

Although theft is a serious crime, the offenders have not been left without any hope of redemption. The holy Quran holds out the promise of forgiveness to them provided they reform themselves

and turn towards Allah as penitent: "But if the thief repent/ After his crime/ And amend his conduct,/ God turneth to him/ In forgiveness; for God/ Is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful" (5:39).

The repentance of the thief will not, however, exonerate him from punishment. But if he sincerely repents and refrains from this vice, Allah in His infinite mercy may redeem him from his sin. Otherwise the worldly punishment will not save him from the wrath of Allah. To cleanse the soul of the sin of stealing, it is essential to turn towards Allah and seek His forgiveness. Once the holy Prophet (peace be upon him) ordered the cutting off of the hand of a thief. After that he admonished him to repent and seek forgiveness from Allah. The thief complied with his instruction and then the holy Prophet (peace be upon him) prayed in his favour.

The critics of Islam have made much ado about the severity of punishment for theft and other offences. They describe them as barbarous and cruel. Islam does not advocate mercy for the wrongdoers and offenders. If we show leniency to them, this will be an abuse of justice. Justice demands that culprits must be severely dealt with. Otherwise it will be difficult to arrest the tide of social vices. Islam does not, however, recommend the cutting off of the hand for theft, stoning to death for fornication, flogging for adultery, etc., unless there is sufficient evidence against the offenders. Moreover, these punishment are decreed only in an Islamic polity which must, in the first instance, eliminate the factors contributing to these offences. The cutting off of the hand for theft is permissible only when the government has established an economic system which ensures a just distribution of wealth. Despite this, if a man commits theft he deserves cutting off the hands. This punishment may seem to be severe but it has proved effective in curbing this menace. In Saudi Arabia, for example, where the Islamic ordinance for theft operates, the incidents of theft have been reduced to the minimum.

To sum up, theft is a potent social evil which must needs be curbed. Islam does not rely upon the punitive measures alone to halt this menace. It enjoins upon the men at the helm to establish a social order, which is free from economic injustice and exploitation. In spite of this if a man resorts to stealing, he does not deserve any leniency because this will only encourage others to indulge in this vice.

ON HYPOCRISY

The English word 'hypocrisy' does not convey the exact shade of meaning which the Arabic word '*munaḥḥat*' connotes. The latter has a wider implication. It implies lack of harmony between a man's profession and his practice. It also means falsehood and treachery. According to the holy Prophet (peace be upon him), there are three signs of a hypocrite: When he speaks, he lies; when he makes a promise, he breaks it; and when he is charged with a trust, he deceives (*Bukhari*). Lack of sincerity in any action falls within the province of hypocrisy. The actions, according to the holy prophet (peace be upon him), are judged according to the intentions. An action may be apparently good, but it is not acceptable to Allah if it is motivated by worldly gain. If a man, for example, builds a mosque with the intention to earn a good name among his fellow-beings rather than to propitiate his Lord, this seemingly virtuous act falls within the category of hypocrisy and is, therefore, worthless. All good acts should, therefore, be devoted to propitiate the Lord. The divine acceptance of our good deed depends upon the state of our heart and mind.

The cause of Islam has always received set-backs because of the hypocrites. A declared enemy is not so dangerous as the concealed one, because you are prepared to face the former whereas in the case of the latter you are caught unawares. When the holy Prophet (peace be upon him) began to preach Islam, there were three categories of people. Those who believed in the message of Islam with assurance and conviction; those who rejected his message; and those who pretended to be good and faithful Muslims, but they were, in fact, inveterate enemies of the Messenger of Allah and His Message. Of such hypocrites, the holy Quran says: "When they meet those who believe,/ They say: "We believe;"/ But when they are alone/ With their evil ones,/ they say: "We are really with you/ We (were) only jesting" (2:14). About them the holy Quran further says that they have bartered guidance for error (2:16). They are like him who kindled a fire, and when it lit up all around him, Allah took away the light (of their perception) and left them in utter darkness when they can see nothing (2:17). This is an apt simile. As the man who wanted light,

kindles a fire which produces a blaze and wins the applause of all around him but it does not last long and the flame goes out darkening the whole atmosphere, so hypocrisy and deception may win temporary success but they ultimately prove fatal for those who are involved in them.

Hypocrisy is a grave sin. The believers have been enjoined to wage war against the hypocrites if they persist in their hostility. The holy Prophet (peace be upon him) ordered the demolition of a mosque at Quba which the hypocrites had built as a *rendezvous* for the conspirators against Islam. The believers have also been admonished to refrain from attending the funeral prayer of a hypocrite unless he repents. In *Sura Al-Nisa*, verse 145, the hypocrites have been warned of grievous penalty on the Day of Judgement: "The Hypocrites will be/In the lowest depths/ Of the Fire: no helper/ Wilt thou find for them."

Islam teaches uniformity of conduct and single-minded devotion to Allah. The believers, since they profess that 'there is no deity except Allah and Muhammad is His Messenger', are obliged to fashion their life according to the tenets of Islam. The predicament of the modern civilization is due to the incompatibility of words and deeds. In national as well as in international relations this dichotomy is writ large. Expediency rather than moral obligation is the watch-word in international relations. Breaking of promises, deception and treachery are considered the feats of successful diplomacy. Peace has become elusive, although the international community is never tired of underlining its need. This state of affair can only be averted if we shake off duality and regulate our life according to the divine ordinance: "Enter completely into the fold of Islam" (2:208). Allah demands total submission to His will. Man's intellectual pursuits, his outlook, behaviour, interaction with other people and modes of endeavour should all be completely subordinate to His teachings. In pursuing such a course of action, man may suffer from temporary set-back but he should not retrace his steps, because this will betray his hypocrisy. And the fate of the hypocrites will be worse than the disbelievers on the Final Day of Reckoning.

ON MONASTICISM

The concept of monasticism is alien to Islam. As in Christianity, Islam does not compartmentalize life into the temporal and the spiritual. It does not admit of either asceticism or deep love for the materialistic world. They are the two extremes which do not fulfil the purpose of man's creation. The position of man in this universe is that of a vicegerent. He cannot assume this responsibility if he renounces the world or becomes too much involved in it. The office of vicegerency calls for maintaining a balance between the worldliness and the other-worldliness. You cannot establish the sovereignty of Allah on the earth, if you retire into seclusion. Such a course of action will only pave the way for the ungodly rule over the earth. The holy Quran disapproves of both these practices:

But the Monasticism/ Which they invented/ For themselves, We did not/ Prescribe for them;/ (We commanded)only/ The seeking for the Good/ Pleasure of God; but that/ They did not foster/ As they should have done./ Yet We bestowed, on those/ Among them who believed./ Their (due) reward, but/ Many of them are/ Rebellious transgressors (57:27).

Monasticism is not ordained by Allah; it is self-imposed by the people. What is made obligatory for the believers is to earn the divine pleasure which cannot be achieved by escaping from the struggle of life. Spiritual elevation, according to the holy Prophet (peace be upon him), consists in striving to follow in the path of Allah (*Musnad-e-Ahmed*). According to the Traditions of *Bukhari* and *Sahih Muslim*, one of the Companions told the holy Prophet (peace be upon him) that he would offer prayer throughout the night; another said that he would always fast and never abstain from it; the third one said that he would never marry in life. The holy Prophet (peace be upon him) replied: "By God, I am more pious and godfearing than you, but I keep fast and also refrain from it, offer prayer as well as sleep during the night, and enter into matrimonial relations. Whoever does not like my way is not of me". This is a clear statement against monasticism. Piety does not lie in self-denial. Like the soul, the body has claim on us. We are commanded to fulfil our obligations not only to the soul but also to the body. In fulfilling our bodily urges we must not, however, transcend the divine

commandment. The life of the holy Prophet (peace be upon him) best exemplifies the equilibrium between the spiritual and the temporal obligations. In spite of the formidable opposition by the enemies of Islam, he continued his mission undeterred.

This world is a place of trial. The Allah-man relationship is that of a Master and a subject. As a subject, there is no choice for man but to obey his Master. To provide guidance to him, Allah delivered His Message through the Prophets. Man is also gifted with the powers of reasoning and discrimination and freedom of choice. He is then left to determine his course of action. But for this freedom it would not have been possible to test him. If he steers himself along the path of virtue, in spite of the worldly temptations, he has acquitted himself well in this trial. If not, he has failed and there is great punishment for him in the world Hereafter. Man's test of his allegiance to the Lord is not possible if he abandons the world. This will, in fact, be an escape from this trial and a flagrant violation of the teachings of the holy Prophet (peace be upon him).

The doctrine of asceticism is not only against the spirit of Islam but also harmful for society. This doctrine is based on the conception that this world and the human body are the means of torture for man. To the ascetics the pleasures of life and the physical needs of man are an anathema. The salvation lies in suppressing the bodily desires and renouncing this world. Such an attitude is harmful in many ways. In the first place, It eliminates the good and pious people from the scene of the world, paving the way for the vicious and the wicked to rule over it. This explains why the rulers have always favoured the monastic ideology. In the history of the world there is hardly any instance of conflict between the rulers and the monastic institution. Secondly, monasticism fosters a pessimistic view of life and wrong conception about God. The people, under the influence of this philosophy, begin to look upon religion as an instrument of cruelty and oppression. People during the Renaissance decried Christianity and upheld the principle of humanism.

To conclude, monasticism is opposed to the spirit of Islam. It is an escape from the struggle of life. The divine intention in creating man is spelt out in the following verse: "Behold, thy Lord said to the angels: "I will create/ A vicegerent on earth" (2:30). The purpose of creating man will be defeated if he resorts to asceticism.

ON HUMAN RIGHTS

Islam lays great stress on safeguarding the rights of every individual. Next to Allah man owes obligations to human beings. The divine ordinance apropos of human rights has been clearly laid down in the following verse:

Serve God, and join not/ Any partner with Him;/ And do good ...
/To parents, kinsfolk;/ Orphans, those in need,/ Neighbours who
are near,/ Neighbours who are strangers/ The companion by our
side,/ The way-farer (you meet),/ And what your right hands
possess (4:36).

In this verse the believers have been enjoined to 'serve God' and do good to the various members of community. In the holy Quran the two commandments, that is, to serve Allah and to serve fellow-creatures, occur simultaneously. This signifies the great importance Islam laid on fulfilling one's obligations to fellow-beings. If a person fails to honour his commitment to Allah, He may in His infinite mercy forgive him. But in the event of the violation of human rights he does not stand the chance of redemption unless the person concerned himself forgives him.

Before the emergence of Islam the Arabs had scant regard for human values. They were revengeful and cruel. Tribal hostilities and feuds continued unabated. They had no notion of conjugal fidelity. The husband had no scruples in sending his wife to others for the sake of worldly gain. The customs of polyandry and female infanticide were very common among them. The pagan Arabs looked upon their wives as their property. They treated them as they liked. Against this background the holy Prophet (peace be upon him) appeared on the scene of Arabia and succeeded in retrieving them from moral and spiritual impoverishment. To the warring Arabs he taught unity and brotherhood; to the parents and children he enjoined to fulfil their obligations to each other; to the husband and wife he commanded to fulfil their commitments to each other; to the affluent he ordered to share their wealth with the poor and the orphans; to the victor he instructed to be kind and humane to the captives. His Farewell Pilgrimage Sermon is a charter of human rights:

Ye people! Listen to my words, for I know not whether another year will be vouchsafed to me after this year to find myself amongst you.

Your lives and property are sacred and inviolable amongst one another until ye appear before the Lord, as this day and this month is sacred for all, and remember ye shall have to appear before your Lord, Who shall demand from you an account of all your actions. Ye people, ye have rights over your wives; and your wives have rights over you ... Treat your wives with kindness Verily ye have taken them on the security of God, and made them lawful unto you by the words of God.

And your slaves! See that ye feed them with such food as ye eat yourselves, and clothe them with stuff ye wear and if they commit a fault which ye are not inclined to forgive, then part from them, for they are the servants of the Lord, and are not to be harshly treated.

Ye people! Listen to my words and understand the same. Know that all Muslims are brothers unto one another. Ye are one brotherhood. Nothing which belongs to another is lawful unto his brother, unless freely given out of good-will. Guard yourselves from committing injustice.

Today man is victim of great injustice and exploitation. There is tension and strife all around. The threat of war looms large on the horizon of the world. The bond of human relationship has ruptured so much so that man has become blood-thirsty. He has hardly any respect for human values. Morally and spiritually decadent as he is, he has no scruples in committing the most heinous crimes. The above sermon provides adequate reply to these ills. Should we act upon this, we can usher in a happier era free from tension and strife.

ON BEGGARY

Islam does not sanction beggary except when it becomes unavoidable. The disabled, the poor widow and the one who has been rendered pauper because of the earthquake, war, famine or other adverse circumstances of life, may beg. But it is not permissible for those who are strong and stout. Islam condemns those who adopt beggary as a profession to increase their wealth. In *surah Al-Dhuha*, verse 10, the believers have been enjoined to examine every petition and judge on its merit: "Nor repulse the petitioner (unheard)". There is a tendency among us to repulse or scorn the petitioners without judging the genuineness or otherwise of their needs. At times we show scorn even when alms is offered to them. Islam teaches us to refrain from this because charity is of no value without sympathy and love. On the other hand to provide financial help to idle sturdy professional beggars is no charity. They are mere parasites on society. The holy Prophet (peace be upon him) also warned the professional beggars in these words:

Begging is neither permissible for the solvent nor for one who is stout and strong, except for one who has got pressing poverty or destroying debt. And whoso begs of men to increase his wealth, will have scratches on his face on the Resurrection Day, and hot stone of Hell will he devour (*Tirmidhi*).

Beggary is a social vice. To eliminate this, Islam has established the institution of *Zakat*. The payment of *Zakat* is obligatory for every Muslim who possesses the surplus amount after meeting his or her requirements. The holy Quran says: "And those in whose wealth/ Is a recognized right/ For the (needy) who asks/ And him who is prevented/ (For some reason from asking)" (70:24-25).

The institution of *Zakat* has twofold advantages. On the one hand it eliminates the concentration of wealth in fewer hands and, on the other, it provides social security to the have-nots. In an Islamic polity it serves the same purpose as the social security schemes such as old age pension, unemployment allowance etc., in the modern economic system. The proceeds of *Zakat* may be invested on those schemes which can re-establish the poor and the

destitute permanently. Those who are physically invalid and unable to work may continue to receive *Zakat* in cash, but those who are able-bodied may receive it in the form of employment or social service.

Besides *Zakat* there are other forms of charity such as supporting the poor relatives, helping the poor in general, defraying the educational expenses of the orphans, donations to societies or organizations which provide social services. Although charity is optional, the affluent section in the community has been admonished to share its bounty with the poor and the needy: "But the Bounty/ Of thy Lord./ Rehearse and proclaim" (93:11). Lest the recipients of charity should feel humiliated, the charity should be dispensed secretly and with the sole purpose of propitiating Allah.

Islam teaches the spirit of self-sacrifice and good neighbourliness. It does not behove the true believers to lead a life of comfort and luxury while some of their brethren are in abject poverty. On the Day of Resurrection those who are bountifully endowed will be called to account for their negligence of and apathy towards their unfortunate fellow-beings. The prosperity and happiness of a society does not depend upon the prosperity and happiness of a few individuals. True happiness lies in the happiness of the community as a whole. This is not possible unless you contribute generously towards the rehabilitation of the poor and the distressed. Poverty breeds many vices. In an Islamic polity, the men at the helm should, therefore, establish a just social order, reducing the gap between the haves and the have-nots. To provide economic stability to the poor, they should reorganize the institution of *Zakat* and mobilize other resources.

ON DRESS

The importance of dress in human life needs hardly to be underlined. Since the creation of this world man has been conscious of its significance, although the style of his dress differed according to the weather conditions and cultural values. The importance of dress can be realized from the fact that when Satan brought about the fall of Adam and Eve, they became aware of their nakedness and felt the need to cover their bodies with the leaves. The holy Quran refers to this in these words:

So by deceit he brought about/ Their fall: when they/ Tasted of the tree,/ Their shame became manifest/ To them, and they began/ To sew together the leaves/ Of the Garden over their bodies (7:22)

As long as they were in a state of innocence, they did not feel obliged to cover their bodies. But the moment they violated the divine commandment, their original purity and beauty were defiled. And it was on account of their nakedness that they were expelled from the heaven. Later as man realized that the exposure of human body was immodesty and in conflict with the laws of nature, he began the use of dress.

Islam has not prescribed any fixed standard of dress. It has only spelt out its purposes which include the covering of the private parts of the body, protection from the inclemencies of weather and the adornment of human personality. The holy Quran says:

O ye children of Adam!/ We have bestowed raiment/ Upon you to cover/ Your shame, as well as/ To be an adornment to you/ But the raiment of righteousness,-/ That is the best (7:22).

One of the purposes of dress, as laid down in the above verse, it to cover the private parts of the body. This is a moral obligation. Islam does not approve their unveiling because Faith without modesty cannot exist. One cannot perform the fundamentals of Islam such as prayer, *Zakat*, fasting and pilgrimage without being properly dressed. In surah *Al-Mu-minum*, verse 5, the believers have been enjoined to protect their private parts. The concept of protection implies that dress should be so designed as to conceal the private

parts of the body. If the dress does not serve this purpose, the wearer will be guilty of transgressing the divine ordinance. For the males the private parts are between the navel and the knees; for the females they constitute the whole of their body. Modesty demands that man should cover the upper parts of the body as well before others. As for the females, they have been ordained to cover their entire body except face, hands and feet when they are within the house before their fathers, brothers, father-in-laws, sons, nephews, etc. But when they go about in public, they must put an outer garment over their dress covering the face, the hands as well as the feet. In *Surah Al-Ahzab*, verse 59, the holy Qur'an commands:

O Prophet! Tell/ Thy wives and daughters/ And the believing women/ That they should cast/ Their outer garments over/ Their persons (when abroad/ That is most convenient,/ That they should be known / (As such) and not be molested.

Man reflects his national identity through the dress. To maintain their cultural entity, the Muslims have been admonished to refrain from imitating the dress of alien nations. Should they do so, it will be difficult to distinguish them from the non-believers. Besides, it shows a slavish mentality. The holy Prophet (peace be upon him) is reported to have said that whoever imitated the people of a nation, he belonged to them (*Ahmed*).

Islam teaches simplicity and austerity in life. It disallows the ostentatious garments of silk and brocade for man. The women are, however, allowed to wear silk. Of the colours the holy Prophet (peace be upon him) liked white or green clothes. According to a Tradition, once a man dressed in red clothes saluted him, but he did not respond (*Tirmidhi*). His silence evidently showed his disapproval of such a dress.

More than ever, the present civilization has made great progress in designing a rich variety of clothing. But they do not serve the purpose ordained by Allah. Instead of covering the private parts of the body, they expose them. Instead of being an expression of our culture, they reflect the culture of other nations. There is also a tendency among women to wear the dress intended for men. All these practices are opposed to the teachings of the Quran. The believers should desist from them.